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**RETHINKING INTIMACY: LOVE, FRIENDSHIP AND SEXUALITY IN THREE  
GENERATIONS OF QUEER WOMEN IN MEXICO CITY (1960-2010)**

by

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Dr. Carlos U. Decena

and approved by

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**ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION**

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This dissertation investigates the transformation of intimacy in the lives of three generations of women participating in queer spaces in Mexico City, at a moment in which sexual citizenship is being redefined in Mexican society. More specifically, this research considers how the social organization, discourses and practices of intimacy have shifted for women participating in queer spaces in Mexico City since the 1960s. My study looks at how the emergence of these transcontinental debates intertwines with the new nationalist rhetoric that has proclaimed Mexico as a pluriethnic and multicultural (instead of *mestizo*) nation. After positioning these debates in processes of national identity and transnational dynamics, I explore through my ethnographic data, how gay and lesbian individuals in Mexico City have reconfigured their views on intimacy (i.e. love, friendship, sexuality) since the 1960s, and in particular in the midst of these changes on sexual citizenship. I focus particularly on women participating in queer

spaces. I suggest that if we truly are to understand queer lives in Latin America, it is imperative to engage with discourses on intimacy produced through the State and other institutional actors and the ways in which these are experienced, rather than primarily centering our analysis on ontological questions as research on same-sex sexuality in Latin America and the Caribbean has continuously emphasized. My qualitative research is based on ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in Mexico City for 10 months in 2009-2010, including participant observation, 45 qualitative interviews and the review of newspapers of record. It is also influenced by seven intermittent years of everyday life in Mexico City since 1998 and a previous anthropological fieldwork research in 2000. Ultimately, my study contributes to the fields of the anthropology and sociology of intimacy, interdisciplinary studies on gender and sexuality in Latin America and notions of sexual citizenship, nationalism, space and place.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **An Introduction to Rethinking Intimacy**

Over a decade ago, when I lived in Mexico City, my friend Alex asked me to meet her at the lesbian café las Virreinas on a Thursday evening. The café was located right behind the mall Plaza Universidad, in a rather safe area of the city. At 6pm I showed up at the café's door, which had no sign anywhere to announce itself. A small lock kept the locale shut, forcing any person who wanted to enter to knock at the door. Toc, toc, toc. Irma, the waitress, opened the door slightly to see who it was. "Hola," I said. She unlocked the door and let me enter the café, which was fairly empty at this early hour of the evening. A woman was sipping a beer by herself and listening to the music that filled the room. On the second floor a few female couples were talking closely, their bodies leaning against each other. My friend Martha had once told me that this was one of the few spaces they had to express affection, without the violence of the gaze in Mexican society, in early 2000.

In 2009, when I returned to conduct fieldwork on intimacy in queer spaces in Mexico City, I went back to las Virreinas. The café had changed owners and was called the café Ellas/Nosotras. At 6pm, traffic was as brutal as it had been a decade ago. The streets were full of workers returning home and the trees decorating the streets shined their deep dark green beauty, right at the same place I remembered them. As I approached the door and was preparing myself to knock, I noticed that the place was actually wide open. The removal of the lock, which might appear as a small change, is in fact deeply interconnected with various social, economic and political changes that have taken place in Mexico City in the past decade.

This dissertation investigates the transformation of intimacy in the lives of three generations of women participating in queer spaces in Mexico City, at a moment in which debates on sexual citizenship are taking place in Mexican society. By debates on sexual citizenship, I mean recent discussions in Mexico City on same-sex marriage, anti-discrimination laws and urban planning of lesbian and gay zones, which all signal to an ongoing public conversation on the forms of intimacy to be legitimated in the city. It was during the Chiapas uprising, the implementation of NAFTA and democratization that sexual citizenship debates surfaced in the mid-1990s. The debates have in fact been taking place across the continent. Informed by this larger set of transformations, this dissertation explores the following question: *How have the social organization, discourses and practices of intimacy shifted for women participating in queer communities in Mexico City since the 1960s?* I suggest that if we truly are to understand queer lives in Latin America, it is imperative to engage with the discourses on intimacy produced through the State and other institutional actors and the ways in which these are experienced, rather than center our analysis on ontological questions as research on same-sex sexuality in Latin America and the Caribbean has continuously emphasized. My qualitative research is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Mexico City for 10 months in 2009-2010, including participant observation, forty qualitative interviews, five informal conversations with activists and the review of newspapers of record. It is also informed by seven intermittent years of everyday life in Mexico City since 1998 and previous anthropological fieldwork research in 2000, which focused on young lesbians' identities.

The subjects of this dissertation are women who participate in queer spaces known as *el ambiente*<sup>1</sup> in Mexico City. They are women who take part in lesbian groups, organizations, who visit the queer cafés, bars or clubs of the megalopolis. Some shy away from these formal visible queer spaces, but they form part of the intimate networks of friendship that sustain *el ambiente* in Mexico City. While I met some of these women a decade ago at an event organized by the lesbian-feminist organization of El Clóset de Sor Juana, I met others through the informal networks of informant's living rooms in 2010. Some of these women vividly recalled the climate of the city in 1968 and the seemingly eternal 70 years of the PRI (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*) rule. Others have lived half of their lives under the rule of the right-wing party, the PAN (*Partido de Acción Nacional*). While I originally intended to focus on the period after 1994, when debates over sexual citizenship intensified, I expanded my period of focus as I discovered in my interviews with women of different ages that their stories in *el ambiente* spanned from the late 1960s until today. Some of these women identify as lesbians, others as bisexuals, other described themselves as pansexual and others refused to associate themselves with any single category. Independently of their sexual identities, all of these women participated in the networks of *el ambiente*, at one point or another in their lives. For this reason I refer to them most of the time through the (long) term “women who participate in *el ambiente*.” I also use the words queer women at times because queer can embrace a range of non-normative practices and unstable subject positions. The word queer, however, was rarely used in Mexico by the women I interviewed. On a few occasions I

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<sup>1</sup> *El ambiente* is a queer environment or milieu that is always lived as a collective experience. It is a circuit of sexual, symbolic or material exchanges that meets in visible spaces associated with queer lives such as clubs, bars, lesbian groups and in more hidden and spontaneous places such as around soccer leagues, living rooms, parks, etc. (see Russo Garrido, 2009)

use “lesbian” as a short-hand term to characterize places geared towards women having same-sex practices, as in, for example, the case of “a lesbian café.” It is nonetheless important to mention that not all the women I interviewed identified with the label lesbian, as I discuss further in Chapter 4.

In Chapter 2, I provide a detailed account on how knowledge was produced to elaborate this dissertation. I provide information on the places where I conducted participant observation and offer a portrait of the people who attended these places. I also elaborate on the forty interviews I conducted with women aged from 23 to 65 years old. I describe how I met the interviewees and the ways in which we spent time together in Mexico City. I also conducted five informal conversations with lesbian activists. These conversations focused on the current political and social climate in regards to LGBT issues in Mexico City. The review of daily articles in the newspapers of record, *La Jornada* and *El Universal* in 2009-2010 provided additional information on public conversations about LGBT issues in the public sphere.

In this introduction, I present key concepts and literatures to contextualize my research. I look at the concepts of the subject and subjectivities, “cultural creativity” and generations. I also connect my work with the anthropology of intimacy and ethnographic research on same-sex sexuality in Mexico. Subsequent chapters engage more directly with other key concepts, such as nationalism, space and place and memory. In this introduction, I focus on key notions and bodies of literature that connect with all of the chapters. I then touch on the significance of my project. Finally, I present an overview of the content of every chapter that forms part of this dissertation.

## **Discourse, Subjectivities and Cultural Creativity**

In this dissertation, I view the subject, subjectivities and subject positions as produced through various discourses that circulate at a given time in Mexico City. For two decades, Foucault's work was concerned with identifying the ways in which discursive shifts over time give rise to various subjects, through the process of subjectification (also translated as subjectivation). As he states: "my work... has been to create a history of the different modes by which our culture, human beings are made subjects" (Foucault, 1982: 126). In this theoretical framework, the subject is produced within a field of power relations, which should be understood as rooted in the whole network of the social. From this perspective, subjects are mainly seen as produced through dominant discourses that are elaborated through privileged position within power. As I discuss further in Chapter 4, subject positions "refer to culturally constructed and ideologically dominant social categories within which individuals are slotted" (Blackwood, 2010). In Mexico City, categories such as *lesbiana*, *bisexual* and *de ambiente*, are different subject positions, which refer in distinct ways to females practicing same-sex sexuality. Subjectivities may also be positioned in relation to dominant discourses. In her work on agency, anthropologist Sherry Ortner has defined subjectivity as "the ensemble of modes of perception, affect, thought, desire, and fear that animate acting subjects" (Ortner 2006: 107). The production of sexual subjectivities in Mexico is largely constituted by the discourses produced by the Catholic Church, the media, governmental institutions, LGBT and feminist movements (Amuschástegui, 2001). The women I interviewed developed their own sexual subjectivities, in relation to contemporary discourses circulating at the moment.

I now want to discuss the ways in which the subject may be thought of as creative, instead of a mere reproducer of discourse. The ways in which subjectivities are positioned in relation to dominant discourses is often described as appropriation or resistance. As Foucault has stated “where there is power there is resistance” (1978: 95-96). However, resistance should not only be understood as reactionary; subversive ideas or practices are not always and only the negative opposition of a dominant idea. I here understand the subject as always appropriating and re-creating discourses according to its position and not simply as asserting or resisting discourse. Subjects position themselves in multiple ways and only focusing on the assertion or resistance to power traps us in a binary that fails to see the strategies subjects use to negotiate power. Such a binary also frames subjects and social transformations as strictly reactive. In his ethnography on masculinities in Mexico City, Matthew Gutmann proposes that a focus on cultural creativity rather than resistance might be more productive. He states:

Cultural creativity is a far more productive concept than resistance in analyzing the inventiveness of the popular classes because it emphasizes not only the desire of ordinary people to react to their life situations, but more importantly, the active ways in which men and women seek to shape their lives every day (1996: 260).

The concept of cultural creativity leads us to question the possibilities that a subject has to invent his or her life, in other words its agency in everyday life. The agent as a “cultural creator” is not thought of as a being of free will, but rather as an actor who “is always enmeshed within relations of power, inequality, and competition” (Ortner, 2006: 131). The notion of the subject as a “cultural creator” highlights the complex interaction of various discourses. As certain forms of queerness are being normalized across the

Americas, a focus on “cultural creativity” may permit to better face the challenge of capturing what recent queer theorizing has brought to our attention as “the contradictions and complexities of being both ‘normal’ and ‘dissident’” (Browne, 2007). As the case of female same-sex desire in Mexico City illustrates, cultural creativity is always embedded within power and inspired by discourses available at the time. Nonetheless, the unexpected ways in which these discourses and knowledge are pieced together, improvised, co-opted and utilized in surprising ways speaks of cultural creativity. Subjectivities on gender, sexuality and intimacy often reflect the complex landscape of discourses circulating in the context.

Importantly, while the subject and subjectivities appear as the end product of power relations, we should never forget that the subject is in fact enmeshed in these relations that promise its mere existence. We must remember that within the field of power, movement and change constitute the force of its existence, sustained by an infinite set of relations. The kinds of relations that are produced through the field of power also dictate the ways in which power sustains itself. This includes so-called intimate relations.

### **The Anthropology of Intimacy**

One of the bodies of literature key to this dissertation is the anthropology of intimacy. The concept of intimacy has increasingly been given attention in the past decade within the social sciences and humanities. Traces of intimacy can be found in some sources from the European Middle Ages (e.g. Myers, 2011). However, I will discuss intimacy throughout this dissertation as it has been tied to the rise of modernity,

capitalism, individualism and in some cases globalization (Hirsch and Wardlow 2006). As a term, 'intimacy' in itself has been defined in various ways, but as sociologist Ken Plummer remarks, 'intimate' "has not unitary meaning but may be seen as a complex sphere of 'inmost' relationships with self and others... They are our closest relationships with friends, family, children, and lovers, but they are also the deep and important experiences we have with self" (2003: 13). Psychologist Ernesto Rago (2008) affirms that intimate relationships may be of five kinds: emotional, intellectual, physical, spiritual or a combination of all.

In this dissertation, I consider a range of intimate expressions animated by love, friendship, solidarity, etc. which sustain relationships between individuals. At times, the subjects involved in these relationships are called lovers, partners, friends, *compadres*, etc. Adrienne Rich's (1980) notion of a lesbian continuum is useful here to think of different forms of intimacy women sustain with one another. Rich's continuum includes sex between women among other modes of relating, but also non sexual interactions including friendship, political support and solidarity. The notion of a continuum problematizes the borders of a subject position such as "friend." It permits us to think about the vast space "in between" subject positions and to question what the production of such categories does in contemporary Mexican society.

In the past decade, a number of edited collections have been published on the anthropology of intimacy (or multidisciplinary cross-cultural perspectives on intimacy) (Bell and Coleman 1999, Hirsch and Wardlow 2006, Hatfield and Rapson 2005, Padilla, Hirsch, Muñoz-Laboy and Sember 2007, Jankowowiak 2008, Cole and Thomas 2009). In

most of these works, emotional intimacy is analyzed as love across cultures. This research is typically rooted in a political economy analysis. My work also takes this approach in the sense that it considers the development of intimacy as rooted in the emergence of a particular social, cultural, economic and historical context. Some of the important questions previous literature asks are about the extent to which macro structures such as capitalism and modernity influence love and other forms of intimate expressions. Research centered on Europe and North America (mostly in sociology) highlights such connections as if capitalism and modernity were a precondition for intimacy. In *The Transformation of Intimacy*, Anthony Giddens posits intimacy and its transformation as tied to modernity. He observes a democratization of the interpersonal domain giving place to what he calls a “pure relationship,” “a relationship of sexual and emotional equality, which is explosive in its connotations for pre-existing forms of gender power” (1993: 2). He suggests that changes in the gendered regime in the Western world, have given place to radically different way of living love and sexuality. Similar findings have been reported in urban areas of Mexico. Social psychologist Mancillas Bazán (2006), who worked on couple’s intimacy in Estado de México, Mexico, observes comparable changes among heterosexual couples. She argues that the transformation of gender identities in Mexico is key to understanding the ways in which couples craft intimacy nowadays. Hirsch (2007), who conducted research in a small town in the state of Jalisco, Mexico suggests that literacy, fertility decline, media representations, and the overarching intertwining of sexuality, modernity, desire and commodification play important roles in this shift, in the ways in which intimacy is lived, particularly in

heterosexual marriage. These changes affect the ways in which same-sex relations are perceived and lived too, as I discuss in chapter 5.

The social phenomena that have contributed to the transformation of intimacy cannot be thought only within the confines of Mexico. Padilla, Hirsch, Muñoz-Laboy and Sember (2007) warn us that local accounts on intimacy should not ignore the ways in which globalization permeates these affective and social relations. Love is not immune to the transnational flow of capital, goods, information and people. For example, forms of intimate social organization such as companionate marriages<sup>2</sup> seem to have extended to various corners of the world (Collier 1997, Inhorn 1996, Kendall 1996, Hoodfar 1997, Hirsch 2003, Hirsch and Wardlow 2006). Numerous studies have pointed out how same-sex sexualities are produced in a globalized world (Plummer 1992, Altman 1996, Manalansan 1997). Transnational queer studies have at times relied on a binary between the “modern” gay and lesbian subject and a sexual subject that is too often represented as premodern, underdeveloped, when not effaced (see Bachetta 2002, Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan 2002, Gopinath 2002, Blackwood 2010). In Latin America, these discussions have often focused on the ways in which the subject is produced, opposing the concepts of identity versus practice. In situating the lives of the women I interviewed in time and space, I acknowledge the transnational flow of discourses on intimacy that circulate in Mexico.

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<sup>2</sup> According to Hirsch and Wardlow (2006: 4) companionate marriage is generally defined in the literature: “to refer to a form of kinship in which the conjugal partnership is privileged over other family ties. In addition, we also use the phrase companionate marriage to suggest two core themes. The first the idea of companionship as a deliberate goal of marriage and, more generally, the idea of marriage as a project, the aim of which is individual fulfillment and satisfaction, rather than (or in addition to) social reproduction.

### **Intimacy and Same-Sex Sexuality in Mexico**

Ethnographic studies on same-sex sexuality in Mexico have generally focused on men. By putting women at the forefront of my study, my research breaks with this tradition while engaging with the rich diversity of these studies. Studies on male same-sex sexuality in Mexico have generally focused on how same-sex sexuality is positioned in social and cultural narratives (see Taylor 1986, Lumsden 1991, Carrier 1995, Murray 1995, Prieur 1998, Nuñez Noriega 1999, Carrillo 2002). Most of these authors suggest that while homosexuality is socially condemned in Mexico, same-sex sexuality may nonetheless be accepted, particularly when it is read through an active/passive binary. While all of these texts allude to emotions and intimacy as part of sexual relations, the focus generally remains on physical sexual intimacy and identities.

This body of work contrasts with mostly Mexican scholarship on women's sexuality and more particularly female same-sex sexuality in Mexico (Mogrovejo 2000, Alfarache Lorenzo 2003, Espinosa Islas 2007, Friedman 2007). This scholarship has generally been more focused on groups and social movement organizing, from street protests to the Internet. Here, same-sex sexuality is often understood under lesbian feminism as a political option. The positioning of lesbians contesting social and cultural norms is discussed in relation to the personal lives of interviewees but also in terms of repercussions for their social movement. Most of these authors write of same-sex sexuality in Mexico as historically permeated by secrecy. Mogrovejo's book title on Mexico and Latin American lesbian movement, *Un amor que se atrevió a decir su nombre* (A love that dared to say its name) (2000), exemplifies the widespread discourse of the time. Movements are now operating in a different context, where societal debates

on intimacy are changing. In *Desobedientes (Disobedient)*, Mogrovejo, Pessah, Miñoso and Robledo (2009) reflect on lesbian polyamory, open relationships and casual sex. In these past few years, groups that defend polyamory have grown in Mexico and in the rest of Latin America. Their analysis connects monogamy and marriage to private property of goods or of a partner and as a strategy of the State to control bodies, minds and feelings. These voices arise at a time when Mexico's Federal District has legitimated unions and marriage between same-sex partners, thus in no doubt leading to these new reflections on contractual and other forms of intimacy.

### **Generations**

This study considers the lives of three generational cohorts of women. The concept of generation has been used at times in the social sciences to signify generations in terms of kinship descent, generation as cohort, generation as life stage, and generation as historical period (Kertzer, 1983). In his review of literature on generations in sociology, Kertzer suggests that generations in terms of kinship descent has often been used in anthropology. It refers to the succession of waves of population that emerge through reproduction. When generations refer to cohorts, the concept points "to the succession of people moving through the age strata, the younger replacing the older as all age together (Kertzer, 1983: 126). In generation as a life-stage, the word is used to point towards a group of people of a certain age, as for example, "the college generation." Finally, generation as historical period marks the relation between a generation and important historical events, as in the 1968 generation.

To my knowledge, very few studies on same-sex sexuality have organized the data through the concept of generation. In *Sex and Sensibility* (1997), sociologist Arlene Stein discusses the story of two generations of lesbian women in San Francisco. Stein studied the identities that women practicing same-sex sexuality have adopted in San Francisco since the 1960s. Women born between 1945 and 1965 had been marked by lesbian-feminist thinking and mostly identified as lesbians. For comparative purposes, Stein interviewed women born between 1961 and 1971. They had been influenced by the rise of queer ideologies. Stein's study highlights how women of different generational cohorts living at a particular time understand their selves and identities differently, given the different contexts in which they lived. More recently, in *If Memory Serves: Gay Men, AIDS and the Promise of the Queer Past*, Castiglia and Reed (2011) explore the question of memory in the queer community after decades of living through the AIDS crisis. Castiglia and Reed document the clash between an older generation that viewed their identities as oppositional to mainstream heterosexist culture and a younger cohort of gay men whom have experienced their sexualities in an era of queer culture commodification, preoccupied with sanitizing sex through institutions such as marriage. As I discuss in Chapter 5, there has also been a shift towards a queer commercialized culture in Mexico City. However, some interviewees perceived the shift from an oppositional gay and lesbian culture to a complicit capitalist culture, as a trend across generations. Castiglia and Reed indirectly point out to the desire of an older generation of gay men to see their revolutionary ideals be embraced by a younger cohort of gay men.

As third wave feminists have pointed out, it is problematic for social movements to inscribe themselves in a logic of reproduction, expecting younger generations to

uphold similar ideologies to those of the past, since it indirectly suggests that feminism is being passed intact (Adkins, 2004). Third wave feminists have also suggested that generational narratives may pose problems as they assume that feminism was once a uniform and unified project (Budgeon, 2011). The logic of reproduction deploys a mother/daughter trope that traps its participants in a set of familial relations where mothers and daughters work out their tensions (Budgeon, 2011). Roof (1997) has also suggested that such trope exploits the Oedipal drama and ultimately re-inscribes women in patriarchal systems presenting them as unable to collaborate with each other. She thus suggests that generational reproductive metaphors are not always productive for feminists in understanding changes within feminism over time.

Third wave feminists have highlighted the limitations of the concept of generation, particularly when inscribed in reproductive expectations. It is also artificial in other ways, as it may split generations by imposing approximate borders. On one hand I use generation as cohorts because it is useful to organize the data. Due to different historical conditions, women in their 20s have had different lives from women in their 60s. On another hand, I believe that it is reflective of the ways in which women organized *el ambiente* in Mexico City. Different women's groups were explicitly addressed to individuals of particular ages or generations. For example, one of the first groups I went to in 2000 was the group *Nueva generación de jóvenes lesbianas* (New generation of young lesbians). This group was reserved for women under 30 years old. The fact that 30 was chosen as a cutoff point reflected (consciously or not) the way in which youth is defined in institutional contexts. In governmental programs, such as the one of the *Instituto de la Juventud de la Ciudad de México* (Youth Institute of Mexico City), youth

is defined as being less than 30 years old. The group *Mujeres Mayores de 30* (Women over 30) was addressed to women over 30 years of age, was addressed to women over 30 years of age, even though the majority of the group consisted of women over 50. In Chapter 2, I discuss more at length how I divided the forty interviewees aged between 22 and 65 years old. However, for now I will say that interviewees are divided in three generational cohorts. The youngest generation was born between 1970 and 1990 (19/40 interviewees). They lived without profound knowledge of what it had meant to live within an enclosed economic system under the 70-year rule of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI). They saw the rise of Zapatismo, the entrance of NAFTA in 1994 and lived the shift in Mexican nationalism from mestizaje to multiculturalism. Women, who were in their 20s, lived almost half of their lives under the regime of the *Partido de Acción Nacional* (PAN). They had had more immediate access to the sites of commercialized queer culture that had become more commonly known in the city. They began taking part in *el ambiente* at a moment when LGBT rights were being brought to the public sphere. The middle generation was born between 1970 and 1950 (19/40). They are more closely connected to the new social movements that emerged out of the 1968 student protests. Many of them began participating in *el ambiente* at a moment in which LGBT culture was largely oppositional to heterosexist institutions. They are more familiar than younger generations, with police repression and the need for queer “safe spaces” in the city. Women of the “oldest” generation are aged over 60 years old. Only two interviewees fall within this category. These women were born prior to the 1950s. These interviewees did not participate in the emerging gay and lesbian liberation movement in the 1970s, even if it was emerging. They dated women for

years and began visiting el ambiente later in the 1990s, when it became visible in public life. The fact that only two women fit this category reflects the small number of women in this age group that I had the opportunity to meet in el ambiente.

### **Significance**

My study examines how individuals in Mexico City are reconfiguring their views on intimacy in a new context. It contributes to the fields of the anthropology and sociology of intimacy, gender and sexuality in Latin America, and notions of sexual citizenship, nationalism, space and place. As mentioned earlier, previous research on same-sex sexuality in Mexico and the LGBT movement draws on the rhetoric of invisibility and rights violations. These few legal initiatives (e.g. same-sex marriage) are far from granting full citizenship in relation to sexuality. Instead, they reposition citizens in a new context that reshapes the field of intimacy in social imaginaries, a change that requires new research.

Scholarship on female same-sex sexuality in Mexico (Mogrovejo 2000, 2009, Alfarache Lorenzo 2003, Espinosa Islas 2007, Friedman 2007, Russo Garrido 2007) principally focuses on activist women, their movements and organizations. Many of these studies privilege lesbian feminists as the subjects of their studies. While this research has been crucial, it fails to capture the diverse subject positions female practicing same-sex sexuality in Mexico occupy. Ethnographic research on intimacy in Mexico and Latin America too often narrowly focus on heterosexual relations (Mancillas Bazán 2006, Gutmann 2007 and Hirsch 2007) or on male same-sex sexuality (Taylor

1986, Lumsden 1991, Carrier 1995, Murray 1995, Prieur 1998, Nuñez Noriega 1999, 2007, Carrillo 2002, Laguarda 2009). One of the important contributions of my research is to bring women to the center of research on same-sex sexuality in Latin America. By focusing on three generations of women who participate in queer spaces, my study provokes a dialogue with decades of research on queer lives in Mexico, which have repetitively focused on masculine bodies or activist groups.

Additionally, in previous studies on same-sex sexuality, themes related with intimate relations have been secondary. Most ethnographic research on non-normative sexualities in Latin America and the Caribbean has focused on questions of identity and the self. While emotional intimacy is discussed, the goals of research focus on the self. For example, in recent ethnographies Allen (2011) explores gendered, raced and sexed self-making in Cuba. In *The Politics of Passion: Women's Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora*, Wekker locates her work in "the sexual identity versus sexual activity debate" (2006: 68). In his study on male same-sex sexuality in Northern Mexico *Masculinidad e Intimidad* (Masculinity and Intimacy), Nuñez Noriega (2007) suggests that anthropology has had little imagination by only representing same-sex sexuality along the identity/practice binary. While research that de-centers the Western sexual subject is of crucial importance, other types of debates seemed to be at the center of queer lives in Mexico City at the moment of fieldwork in 2009-2010. The question was not "Who am I?" but, borrowing Foucault's words in *Friendship as a Way of Life*: "What relations, through homosexuality, can be established, invented, multiplied, and modulated" (Foucault, 1996: 308)? While one question does not exclude the other, thinking of relationships urges us to focus our attention on other aspects of collectivities.

My research highlights the importance of engaging with discourses on intimacy produced by the State and other institutional actors, rather than only focusing on ontological questions as ethnographic research on same-sex sexuality in Latin America and the Caribbean has continuously produced. While I consider this aspect in my research, my central focus is on intimacy, and the potential relationships that emerge through this productive space.

### **Dissertation Overview**

My study engages the lives of three generations of women. In *el ambiente*, I met young teenage women who hung out on the sidewalks of *calle Amberes* outside of bars, chatted and listened to their iPods. I also encountered women in their late 60s who attended poetry readings or took part in the activities of lesbian support groups. As they told me about their lives, I listened to what it had meant for them to be queer women in Mexico City in 1965, 1984 and 2010. The complexity of grappling with the simultaneous temporalities that forms part of the narratives of informants requires the clarification of the social, cultural, political and economic context through time. In Chapter 2, I discuss the setting (*el ambiente* in Mexico City) and methods that form the basis of this study. I draw a portrait of the changing urban megalopolis, during the life-time of the women I interviewed. Chapter 3 provides additional context by introducing the reader to the discursive and economic shift brought by Mexican nationalism. I pay particular attention to the shift from *mestizaje* to multiculturalism, and how this provided a new context in which conversations on sexual citizenship became part of public life in Mexico. It is in

this context that LGBT and feminist movements seized opportunities for coalitional work through liberal activism, bringing changes such as anti-discrimination laws, same-sex unions and the reform on marriage. As recent research has suggested, today many states do not only repress, but produce non-normative sexualities (Puar 2007, Fassin 2008, Scott 2009). In this new situation, is Mexican national identity still centered on heterosexism? While such a broad question might require more than one answer, I want to suggest that a change takes place in Mexico in the 1990s with regards to sexual normativity, precisely at the moment in which the central myth of *mestizaje* is set aside. This national redefinition that embraces multiculturalism, coincides with a new relationship to the rest of the world in the so called era of globalization, economic liberalization and a certain effort towards democratization. After looking at the ascension of the sexual citizen within this shift from *mestizaje* to multiculturalism, I examine the production of sexualities through two central events that directly touched on sexual citizenship at the time of fieldwork in 2009-2010: The discussions on same-sex marriage and the celebration of the bicentennial celebration. These two cases illustrate the production of non-normative sexualities in the era of multiculturalism.

After setting the shifting context, I explore in Chapter 4 what it has meant for women to practice non-normative sexualities in Mexico City, as women. More particularly, I discuss the subject positions that have been available to women in Mexico to make sense of same-sex sexuality from the 1960s until today. I locate the gendered and sexual subject positions through the narratives that were offered by the women I interviewed. Some of these subject positions, such as *la lesbiana* or *la bisexual*, are produced through discourses that circulate in the public sphere. I also trace the subject

positions that form part of the subjugated knowledge (*la tortillera, la lencha, de ambiente*) in queer spaces, women's neighborhood and towns where they grew up. Most of the subject positions I explore in this chapter have rarely been identified as possibilities for women in Mexico City. In this sense, this chapter destabilizes the woman category in Mexico by looking at the intersection of gender and sexuality. Additionally, this chapter contributes to a long due discussion on female same-sex sexuality, identity and practices in Latin America. As Nuñez Noriega (2007) has suggested, dominant sexual or gender identity categories will never fully reflect the complex "realities" of same-sex erotic and affective interaction. It is, however, difficult to embark on a project that would focus solely on how to think beyond categories, when these have not even been mapped in the case of female same-sex sexuality. In Chapter 4, I thus trace what it has meant to be a woman in Mexico since the 1960s and which subject positions have circulated in the lives of informants since the 1960s.

The following chapter examines how women who participate in queer spaces negotiate intimacy in their everyday lives. In the social sciences, intimacy has increasingly been conceived as a product of modernity. I begin Chapter 5 by reviewing the ways in which informants understood intimacy in their lives. Interviews suggested that intimacy is seen as a personal space that has the potential to enable connections. Through this spatial metaphor, I explore a continuum of affective ties and practices that were related to intimacy in interviews, including love, sexuality and friendship. I show how these relationships are linked to imaginaries that resulted from the debates that led to the 2009 marriage reform, which for the first time included same-sex couples. Discourses on same-sex marriage as a form for couples of the same-sex to relate stood in tension

with oppositional discourses on polyamory that widely circulated in *el ambiente*, at the time of fieldwork. These discussions were in fact taking place across Latin America where same-sex marriage is increasingly accepted and reflections on polyamory are spreading in different countries. Debates on polyamory in *el ambiente* opened reflections on the possibility of redefining love and relationships, including friendship. Friendship is an intimate way of relating that often remains beneath State policing. It does not usually intend to reproduce either life or the traditional family. Yet it is grounded on intimacy that is mobilized in “modern” relationships. Friendship also complicates the ways in which queer spaces are imagined as prominently sexual and homosexual. Ultimately, this chapter asks how women taking part in *el ambiente* are reconfiguring their views and practices on intimacy in the current context, where new discourses on forms of organizing intimacy are circulating (i.e. same-sex marriage and polyamory)? How are women organizing love, friendship and sexuality?

In Chapter 6, I look at the ways in which two generations of women have mapped queer Mexico City. Since only two women in my study were over 60, I regrouped them with women of a neighboring age group for the purpose of the chapter. Mapping pinpoints to the geographical location of queer places in *el ambiente* in Mexico City. This exercise also reveals the social, political and economic dimensions of *el ambiente* at a particular point in time. It exposes the ways in which the different places of *el ambiente* are mapped in terms of gender, class and age, questioning the dichotomous organization of space along the heterosexual/homosexual binary. I mainly focus on *el ambiente* in the late 1970s and 1980s in contrast with contemporary places of *el ambiente* where informants went to in 2009-2010. This artificial crystallization in time permits a

comparison of the ways in which *el ambiente* and the city have been transformed. While I think of queer spaces through the notion of *el ambiente*, more broadly than the mere existence of places, these places are key to community formation. Importantly, the cafés, bars, activist groups and other places have appeared and disappeared over the years, without leaving traces of their passage. Different generations have knowledge of different places at the present moment since *el ambiente* tends to be deeply divided by age. Observing the different generational maps, I suggest that a relationship to ephemeral places constitutes groups of women as generations. How are ephemeral places meaningful for generations and their constitution? In the last part of the chapter, I also explore the scarce possibilities of intergenerational knowledge transmission in *el ambiente*, related to a small lesbian archive and few intergenerational spaces. What does operating without an archive and scarce places of interaction mean for community formation and its memory?

I conclude with a brief epilogue that considers the main insights that permit refining our understanding on: How have the social organization, discourses and practices of intimacy shifted for women participating in queer communities in Mexico City since the 1960s?

## **Chapter 2**

### **Creating Ethnographic Knowledge: The Setting and Methods**

#### **A Preface to my arrival to Tenochtitlán**

I conducted fieldwork in Mexico City from October 2009 to September 2010. Before fieldwork, I had lived three times in Mexico City for a total of 6 years between the periods of 1998 to 2006. Earlier in my life I had also traveled multiple times from Quebec to Mexico City to visit family members in the metropolis. Many of them visited us as well, and in the summer the house was always filled with visitors from the Federal District. Most of my family's Latino friends in Quebec City were Paraguayan as my father or from other South American countries. They had fled the dictatorial regimes that plagued the Southern cone in the 1970s, but travelers of my youth mostly came from Mexico. In 2001, in the course of one of my extended stays in Mexico City, I became a dual-citizen. During the times I lived in Mexico City (the longest being 3 ½ years), I became familiar with the city. Mexico City is a place that you never can know entirely because of the immensity of the city that has spread in all directions.

As Geertz (1992) and Gupta and Ferguson (1992, 1997) suggested over a decade ago, the spatialized notion that constructs the field, as a distant land where one encounters the 'other' to produce work, is based on problematic assumptions that evoke hierarchies between people and places. It also "obscures many of the realities faced by anthropologists working at the end of the twentieth century" (Caputo, 2000: 19). There have been times in my life when Mexico is more distant in my mind, body and everyday life, but at many moments it has been home. My relationship with Mexico is made of

trajectories crossing over the hemisphere, staying and leaving, blood, planes, families, legends and memories.

In this chapter, I discuss the setting and the methods I used to conduct fieldwork. I begin by presenting information on the setting: Mexico City. I then reduce the confines of the field to *el ambiente* in Mexico City. Further, I discuss the methods I used, who are the research participants and the ways in which I interacted with informants during fieldwork. Finally, I provide information on interviewees who participated in this research. In this chapter, I clarify the limits and possibilities of my responses to the guiding question: How have the social organization, discourses and practices of intimacy shifted for women participating in queer communities in Mexico City since the 1960s? In brief, the goal of this chapter is to orient the reader on the context where data was collected and how knowledge was produced for this study.

## **The City**

If I am to state clearly my field site, the official confines of Mexico City would establish the limit. We know that these “imaginary” lines are traversed every day by hundreds of cars, buses and horses. Planes land near the center of the city. Pilgrims walk for miles to the Basilica de la Virgen or make it to their appointment for a legal abortion. Mexico City inhabitants do not only interact with their neighbors, as people, idea and capital constantly travel across the borders of the city. As I discuss further, many informants who took part in Mexico’s City *ambiente* lived in the contiguous state *El Estado de Mexico*. Together, the Federal District and the Estado de México form Mexico City’s metropolitan area.

Founded in 1325, as the Aztec kingdom of Tenochtitlán, the site of present-day Mexico City rapidly became a huge metropolis and trade and service center for one and a half million people who lived in the surrounding valley prior to the Spanish conquest. In 1521, it became the capital of New Spain when Spaniards took control of the site. Mexico City is located in a high mountain valley at approximately 2,200 meters above sea level (National Research Council, 1995: 1), hundreds of miles from the sea or navigable rivers and is also the center of an earthquake zone.

The metropolitan Mexico City area, which was once a green open valley of blue mountains, lakes and volcanoes is today one of the largest cities on earth. Every side of the valley is now covered with houses. Inhabitants from all parts of the country have been moving to Mexico City since the 1930s when the city experienced an important population growth rate. The mechanization of agriculture, industrial development and population pressures on limited land resources pushed migratory waves into towns which were transformed into cities (Urquidi, 1975). By 1980, as migratory waves of rural people transformed provincial towns into cities and the capital, Mexico City into a megalopolis; census figures for that year showed that the country had become more than two-thirds urban (Alba and Potter, 1986). Even though population figures are inexact, it is estimated that in 2000, 18.4 million people lived in Mexico City's metropolitan area, which is 18.9% of the national population (EMI, 2006: 4). In the 2010 census, it was estimated that the Federal District counted with 8, 851,080 inhabitants and 15,175, 862 lived in El Estado de México with (INEGI, 2010). While the rate of population growth has slowed and even declined since the 1980's, immigration to the surrounding jurisdictions has been responsible for significant population increase and urban expansion

within the greater metropolitan area (National Research Council, 1995: 1). Rapid growth over the past 50 years has been characterized both by planned urban and residential areas for the middle and upper class, and by unplanned and illegal land appropriations by immigrants to the peripheral areas. Public services remain incomplete for long periods of time in the squatter settlements, even though they are eventually provided.

The megalopolis remains an important center of economic production. In 2004, INEGI's economic census reported that the GNP produced by the city was of 1,538 trillion pesos; approximately 24.35% of the total GNP (EMI, 2006: 8). During fieldwork, the country was living a difficult economic situation. According to the OCDE, in 2009, Mexico suffered its worst recession since the 1994 *peso* devaluation due to the low cost of petroleum, low exportations and remittances and the H1N1 flu virus sanitary alert, which affected tourism (Reuters, AFP, DPA, 2009). Although official numbers suggested that in 2010, unemployment was officially 6.48% (INEGI, 2011), 51% of the country was living in poverty (González Amador, 2009). Underemployment was chronic and about three out of every ten Mexicans earned their living in the informal economy (Marquez-Padilla and Tapia, 2006). According to the governmental council *Evalúa-DF*, 67% of the population in the Federal District lived in poverty and among those, 35% in extreme poverty (Romero, 2010). Taking into account basic necessities, such as education, housing, sanitary services and wages, *Evalúa-DF* (2011) considered that 18% of the population lived in neighborhoods (*colonias*) of high social development, 21% (middle social development), 37% (low social development) and 23% lived in neighborhoods of very low social development.

Mexico City is known for its permanent smog. The thickness of this artificial fog is so bad that the surrounding mountains are usually invisible. Industrial growth, the population boom and more than 3.5 million of vehicles (30% more than 20 years old) contribute to the situation (Hibler, 2003). In 2009-2010, stories about drug wars, kidnappings and violence in general abounded in the newspapers. According to INEGI, 60% of Mexico's inhabitants in 2010 felt that the country was less safe than the previous year (Zuñiga, 2011). Since he entered office in 2006, President Calderón has put into place aggressive strategies to combat organized crime. There have been 48,000 drug-related deaths since the beginning of the drug wars (Fantz, 2012). Calderón has claimed that most of those deaths involved criminals. However, organizations such as Human Rights Watch highlighted the ways in which Mexico's military and police have committed human rights violations in efforts to combat organized crime, virtually none of which are being adequately investigated or reported (HRW, 2011). While most direct violence related to the drug wars takes place in the Northern States of the country, the turn towards an aggressive combat of organized crime and military occupation was present in the mind of Mexico City's inhabitants while I conducted fieldwork. Mexico City's inhabitants have been familiar with a sense of danger for decades now. The Federal District and Baja California count with the highest crime incidence in the country (ICESI, 2005). The inhabitants of the megalopolis felt less safe than the ones of other cities. Earlier in 2002, only 11% of Mexicans living in an urban area felt that it was unsafe to live in their city, while 38% of Mexico City inhabitants expressed that they felt unsafe in their city (Jiménez Ornelas, 2002: 158).

Since 1997, the Federal District has been in the hands of the *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (PRD), a leftist party. The PRD has been in general friendly in the past few years to LGBT politics. During fieldwork the country was governed by the *Partido de Acción Nacional* (PAN), a party of right wing tendencies. Previous to 2000, Mexico had been governed by the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) for 70 years. The election of the PAN brought hope for democracy in the country. This hope was short lived as the results of the following election in 2006 were questioned. Many Mexicans suspected the PAN had defeated the PRD by means of an electoral fraud. After fieldwork, in July 2012, the PRI won the election, which results were once again questioned by large sectors of the population.

### **Flânage in the City: The routes traveled**

Any site in the city could provide a piece of information for research. However, I had easier access to the neighborhoods where I frequently traveled in my everyday life. During my year of fieldwork, I took part in the program for invited scholars of the gender study program (PUEG) at the National University (UNAM). Through the program, I had the opportunity to join the seminars “Borders and Citizenship” and “Lesbian Theory in Latin America” and interact with scholars and activists. I lived right next to the university in a neighborhood called *Copilco El Alto*, where I rented a small studio apartment for the year (a neighborhood of middle social development). This mostly working class neighborhood, populated by families who have resided there for decades and a few students and faculty, was a few minutes away from a university neighborhood. It was also near the colonial area of Coyoacán where I had lived in the past and the subway that took

me to any area of town. As part of my weekly routine, I traveled to la colonia Roma to attend yoga class. This old neighborhood, which is the setting of Luis Zapata's gay novel *El Vampiro de La Colonia Roma* (1979),<sup>3</sup> is nowadays filling up with brand new condos, coffee shops and experimental cuisine restaurants, attracting yuppies, *extranjeros*<sup>4</sup> and artsy characters. I also took part in the weekly life of the Centro Zen de Mexico, located in the South of the City by *Taxqueña*, a supportive community of serious meditation practitioners who welcomed me wholeheartedly. Over half of the community were senior citizens who enjoyed talking about the new exploits of their grand-children, and the latest headlines. My grand-mother's home was part of my urban trajectory as well. We met at least once a month for lunch, at my aunt's house. By cab, our houses were at about 15 minute apart from each other. I would have to leave my ID at the door with the security guards every time I entered her colonia Joyas del Pedregal, a middle-class residential community surrounded by tall walls. Aside from these "other" networks of support and friendship in the city, I spent most of my time with friends met in places of *el ambiente*. These were friends I had met in the past ten years and new friends I met principally through lesbian or queer groups during fieldwork.

### ***El ambiente***

Most of my research was conducted in what is called at times in everyday life *el ambiente*. As previously mentioned, *el ambiente* is a queer environment or milieu that is always lived as a collective experience in places such as clubs, bars, lesbian groups. It also takes place in less visible places such as soccer leagues, living rooms, parks, etc. *El*

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<sup>3</sup> See Sifuentes-Jáuregui (2005) on *El Vampiro de la Colonia Roma*

<sup>4</sup> Foreigner- usually used to refer to foreigners from North America or Europe.

*ambiente* is a traveling network that takes hold of particular places and bodies for prolonged or shorter periods, as the expression *ser de ambiente* (to be of the ambiente) illustrates.

During my first three months in Mexico City, I mainly traveled the less visible spaces of *el ambiente*. I spent time with friends I had met during my previous fieldwork in Mexico City in the year 2000. In fact, my first night in Mexico City I arrived to Mónica and Celia's house, in la colonia San José Ibararán, a few blocks from where my mother spent most of her youth. My friends had met one another through me a decade ago. I had been their friend separately, before they met. Camilla, their dog, greeted me with enthusiasm at the door. I had not seen Mónica for three years and she approached me to give me a warm hug. In the following weeks, I often spent time in coffee shops and movie theatres with my friend Deborah, whom I also met a decade earlier at the lesbian organization El Clóset de Sor Juana. Deborah and I had seen each other more recently, as she had lived in New York City in 2008. Together, we philosophized in the streets, on cities of the North, her travels to Japan, lost loves and just life as it is. And there was also Monse, whom Deborah and I had also known for ten years, who pulled photos out of the closet every time we went to her house near *El Centro Histórico*. We laughed at our malicious smiles in the pictures and the messy tableau of a late night spent with cigarettes and beers, midnight in September a decade ago. There were also some pictures about the night we wore ties and walked all over the city in "drag," in year 2000. Monse's new partner, Myriam, would look at us a bit annoyed with our endless accounts on *locuras* we dared to do at the time. I often discussed my research with my friends who provided me

ideas for questions, the ways in which certain events could be understood and new directions to explore.

During this initial period, I began going to a few places of the visible spaces of *el ambiente* I wanted to visit. It is through the Website of the Café Ellas/Nosotras, I became acquainted with Shakti (Les Yoga) class “para mujeres gays” (for gay women). The group met once a week on the second floor of the Café Ellas/Nosotras, located right behind the mall Plaza Universidad in the South of Mexico City. The group met every week for an hour and a half to practice yoga with Shakti, a certified *Kundalini* yoga instructor. Approximately 7 to 10 women attended the class. Some students attended every week, while others came from time to time. Participants had heard about the group through the Webpage of Ellas/Nosotras, Skati’s Facebook page, through a friend or occasionally through a flyer that was distributed in various popular places of *el ambiente*. The group had been created in 2009. After yoga, we usually had tea on the first floor of the building and chatted for about an hour about our lives in general. These spontaneous discussions were useful to meet research participants and build new friendships and networks of support (for all class participants, myself included). Through these new contacts, I was at times invited to take part in other activities and get to know other places.

María Luisa, a regular attendee at Shakti (Les Yoga), invited me and the teacher Claudia to a poetry reading at the book store Voces and Tinta. The bookstore is located in the Zona Rosa, a part of town that is often described as the LGBT neighborhood. The store specialized in titles on gender and sexuality studies. The books were printed across Latin America and Spain. DVDs on LGBT themes were also sold at the store. Most of

them were European or US films. The store also counted with a café and various cultural events, such as poetry readings, theatre plays, academic book presentations, etc. I visited Voces and Tinta a few times to attend events, and I conducted two interviews in their café. The public often varied depending on the event.

During 2010, I left the comfortable routine I had established when I arrived to fieldwork in October 2009 going to the seminar at UNAM, reading for class and research, visiting friends and attending events and places of *el ambiente* I wanted to enjoy. I stretched my horizons and began visiting different groups and places of *el ambiente*, interviewing research participants and traveling to places where I would normally resist going (mostly clubs). I let the ethnographic research process take my body, time, resources and thoughts.

One of the first groups I connected with was the lesbian university group at the National University (UNAM) GLU (Grupo Lésbico Universitario). A student at the seminar “Borders and Citizenship” invited me for dinner at her house with some of her friends. At that small gathering, I met Nadia and Gabriela, some of the central organizers of the group. The group met twice a month on the second floor of the Café Ellas/Nosotras.

Most participants were university students. However, the meeting was open to anyone. The main goal of GLU is to generate spaces of support, visibility and strengthening for the community of young lesbians in the Federal District, from the university environment (GLU, 2012). GLU takes part in diverse actions, such as the *Semana lésbica* (Lesbian week) where academic, artistic and activist presentations take place on campus. They also offer workshops on issues relevant to lesbian lives. Many

women participated in the meetings to get to know other women who took part in queer spaces. After the meetings, we often went to the colonial plaza of Coyoacán to get ice cream, coffee or *esquites*. We hung out by the fountain, laughed and talked while looking at people walk by. About five women attended every meeting I was there. Another group of them attended from time to time. A few participants attended once and never came back to the group. In average, 10 to 20 women were present during meetings. Most women were in their twenties, although occasional visitors were in their thirties or forties. In 2010, I returned to the meeting of the group *Musas de Metal*, which I had previously visited in 1998 and 2000. The organization was founded in 1995. I had run into the organizers in the past few years, in particular around activities planned by the organizing committee of the *VI Lesbian Feminist Encounter of Latin America and the Caribbean*, which took place in Mexico City in 2004. So when I arrived to the meeting in March 2010, the main organizer, Paulina, welcomed me and greeted me back with enthusiasm. This group met every three weeks. At the time, meetings took place at a rented locale in *colonia* Condesa. The meetings were mainly based on discussion, serving as a support group for women with diverse sexual preferences (but mostly involved in female same-sex sexuality). As in other discussion groups, themes related to same-sex sexuality were discussed. For example, the first time that I participated, the theme was “Is it important to be in a relationship?” Women explored the question and an organizer facilitated the dialogue, asking new questions, introducing a guest or taking part in workshop activities. Women of different ages attended, but the majority seemed to be in their thirties. A core group attended almost every meeting, but an important floating population attended the group occasionally. This space was useful to meet new research participants, but also to

collect information since diverse points of view on a topic were given through the meetings.

Since most participants over forty years old did not attend the previous groups, many interviewees suggested I visit the group *Mujeres mayores de 30* (Women over 30). I had never attended this group in the past. Instead, in terms of age specific groups I had attended the meetings of *Nueva Generación de Jóvenes Lesbianas*, which welcomed women younger than 30 years old. In 2010, I attended a meeting of *Mujeres mayores de 30* for the first time. Pamela, one of the participants said that when they started in 1999, they were in their thirties, but now that they were in their forties and fifties they still kept “*mayores de 30*” (over 30). “It makes us feel younger,” Pamela joked. Lydia, one of the founders, said that when she came back from Los Angeles, USA, where she lived for a couple of years, there were mostly young women in *el ambiente* in Mexico City. She wanted to form a group of women who were in a more similar phase of life, and thus founded *Mayores de 30*. The group met twice a month at Lydia’s apartment. The group also had had its meetings in the past at *El Clóset de Sor Juana*, and later at the *Café Ellas/Nosotras*. Generally, a speaker came to the group to give a talk. Some of the themes that were touched on when I attended (or received an announcement for) were on anorexia, the political and economic situation in Mexico, the path to the 2012 election, safe sex between women, and polyamory. After the talk, we often went for lunch at a restaurant nearby. As in other groups, there was a small core population that attended almost every single session and a larger floating population that occasionally visited, or went once to never return. There were generally 15 to 40 participants at each session.

Finally, towards the end of fieldwork I met Esther, the founder of a group called Jotifamily. This group mostly met through Facebook and Hi5 and went to events that were announced through these pages. I met Esther at a celebration for the reform on marriage that took place on Amberes street in La Zona Rosa in August 2010. Esther, 25 years old, was in fact one of the oldest members of her online group. She introduced me to other of the members of the group who were dancing on the street. Yazmín and Alegria were aged of 14 and 16 years old. They came from time to time from the outskirts of the city in Iztapalapa, to *calle* Amberes to spend time with their friends on the sidewalks of this street known as “the gay street.” Esther had organized the previous year a trip to Acapulco for the lesbian community. Nonetheless, an important amount of interaction took place online, as members of the group socialized among themselves, beyond planned activities.

In her ethnography on a lesbian feminist group in Mexico City, Alfarache Lorenzo (2003, 231) speaks of *lugares del ambiente* (places of el ambiente), only as gay and lesbian bars and clubs. For some participants, *el ambiente* is mostly related to bars, clubs. During fieldwork, I visited some bars and clubs. These places constantly close and open in such a way that it is difficult to keep track of them. The webpage *Antrosgay.com* lists 87 bars and clubs (typically called *antros*) in the Federal District. The Webpage is aware of their short life since 12 of the bars have a line right next to the name saying *ya no existe* (it does not exist anymore). Very few of these places were strictly created for women. Informants mentioned that they went to El Botas, Pussybar and Kaos. Some bars such as Lipstick and Cabaret-Tito VIP had women’s nights. Visits to bars were rather occasional. I only went when informants invited me. In my previous research in 2000, I

spent a lot of time in bars and clubs of *el ambiente*. While I learned a lot about the dynamics of the scene, I found it difficult to meet key informants through these places. The population constantly fluctuates, which makes it challenging to build a network. In fact, only two of my interviewees came through bars in my past experience, and only one during the fieldwork I conducted in 2009-2010. In addition, I am a terrible dancer and I do not drink, thus I lacked some of the skills that would have made me more of an ‘insider’ in the bar scene. Occasionally, I went out with friends to bars in La Zona Rosa. In total, I went to seven different establishments, most of them located in central parts of the city. There were a great variety of places, sometimes where it was hard to perceive any similarity in terms of design, music and of clientele that could vary in terms of age, social class, gender, etc. Some places had no cover charge while others could cost as much as 200 *pesos*, approximately the equivalent of 21 USD, a high price to pay when the minimum wage is approximately 5 USD/day. At one point, I asked friends to bring me to some of the bars in or near *colonia* Centro Histórico. I wanted to get to know a bar that was more oriented towards the working class population. Every single friend who offered to bring me suggested that we should go in a large group of men and women, since those places were dangerous, in their opinion. Finally, Nadia and three of her friends took me to *el 69* on Eje Central in the *colonia* Centro Histórico, near Garibaldi. The bar was mostly populated by young men in t-shirts and jeans, who danced to *salsa*, *cumbias* and *rancheras*. I discuss further the bar scene in Chapter 6.

There were also two women's cafes at the time of fieldwork. Cafes were more of a space to talk with friends and less based on dancing and flirting as were bars and clubs. They often offered cultural activities, such as poetry nights, folk singer shows, yoga classes,

book presentations etc. Voces en Tinta, Café Ellas/Nosotras and Café D'Allys were some of the places that women visited. In the latest two, men could enter but they were meant to be primarily places for women.

### **Research Participants: Who they are**

In the course of research I spoke with diverse people in terms of age, sex, gender and class. In fact, any person could share information on women participating in *el ambiente* in Mexico City. The majority of people I came in contact with took part in *el ambiente* in Mexico City. Information was principally collected with individuals who were born female at birth, recognized themselves as women socially during the time of fieldwork, and desired women romantically and/or sexually. Two interviewees were born male at birth, but recognized themselves as women socially, and both were attracted to women and participated at times in lesbian spaces.

Among the women I interviewed the youngest was 22 years old while the eldest was 65 years of age. All the interviewees lived in the Mexico City metropolitan area. Almost all had lived over  $\frac{3}{4}$  of their lives in Mexico City, with the exception of one interviewee who had migrated from Uruguay ten years ago. I must have met more than a hundred women participating in *el ambiente* in the course of fieldwork and many others over the years spent in Mexico City.

During fieldwork, I was introduced to a wide range of spaces and neighborhoods of different social classes in the urban area. Social classes are extremely marked in Mexico, where the gap between rich and poor is noticeable in the dynamics of everyday life and the social geography of the city. For this reason, I considered important to

interview women of various social classes (although *el ambiente* tends to be oriented towards the middle classes). The process to determine a person's social class is rather complex. When I asked interviewees how they identified in terms of class, only two women suggested that they identified as working class (in their words, *clase baja* (low class). Ten women identified as lower middle class (*media baja*) and three women as upper middle class (*media alta*). The twenty three remaining women simply suggested that they were middle class. Therefore a majority of interviewees identified with the middle classes. In "Mexico's Middle Class in the Neoliberal Era," Dennis Gilbert discusses how scholars have found problematic to define the middle class in Mexico. Gilbert suggests that the Mexican middle class consists of "families headed by individuals with non-routine, non-manual occupations, living on incomes comfortably above the popular average but below the peak of the national pyramid...with household incomes at least 50 percent than the median income" (2007: 12). The middle class thus includes a family of teacher that makes 6000 pesos (460\$ approx.) a month, as a family where an executive makes 30,000 pesos (2300\$ approx.) a month for the whole family. Gilbert suggests that the 6000 pesos earned by the lower middle classes would be just enough to cover middle class essentials (decent housing, telephone, a car and basic household expenses). By this standard, only 19, 5 % of Mexican households are considered middle class (Gilbert, 2007: 16). The subjective ways in which informants identified mirrored to a certain extent the places where the pool of interviewees lived. As described above *Evalúa-DF* has developed an index of development that categorizes neighborhoods (*colonías*) in terms of access to basic necessities, such as education, housing, sanitary services and wages. According to this measure, 12 interviewees lived in

neighborhoods of high social developments, 9 in neighborhoods of middle social development, 9 in neighborhoods of low social development and 2 in neighborhoods of very low social development. One participant lived in a neighborhood of very low or low social development (provided the name of the neighborhood, but not the section). Four women lived in Estado de México for which the measure is not available, and in the case of three interviewees I was unable to find the neighborhood on the charts of *Evalúa DF*. If we consider these measures, more than half of the women lived in middle or high development neighborhoods. About  $\frac{1}{4}$  lived in low social development neighborhoods and only 2 lived in very low social development neighborhoods. Considering that 60% of neighborhoods in the Federal District are of low or very low social development, interviewees tend to live in better conditions than the norm. This trend supported the orientation towards middle class identification. Nonetheless, looking at individual cases I was at times perplexed by seemingly contradictory responses when juxtaposing identification with the neighborhood and profession. For example, Alicia 65 years old, identified as lower middle class. She was a physician, who lived in a neighborhood that is indexed as having a high social development. She had been living at the same address for the past 13 years, possessed a car and a stable clientele of patients. When I arrived to her home for the interview, she told me she had just got off the phone to get information on the forms and process she had to follow for her retirement. I would have expected her to identify at least as middle class, but her perception was distinct. Some of the women whom identified as middle class lived in neighborhoods that are indexed as having very low social development. The neighborhood, the occupation (or family's occupations) seemed in a few cases at odds with subjective class identification.

Among the interviewees, all had *preparatoria* schooling (grade 11 to 13). Only seven of the interviewees did not have an undergraduate degree or had never attended university. This represents a level of education that is above the national average, where about 19.3% of the population above 15 years old has completed *preparatoria* and 15.9 % of women have college or post-graduate education (26.6% of women in the Federal District) (INEGI, 2010a). Interestingly, all the seven women who had not attended college with the exception of one were 40 years of age or older. As I discuss in Chapter 4, nowadays more than 50% of students attending the National University (UNAM) are women.

Even though there were daily news reports related to indigenous communities in Mexico, the issue of ethnicity was rarely mentioned in everyday conversations. When I asked informants with which ethnic group they identified, I received a body of non-consistent responses than spanned from a puzzled look in my direction to “none,” “latina,” “Mexicana,” *no sé* (I don’t know). Guadalupe, a 63 years old lawyer who had lived in Mexico City all of her life, was the only informant who conventionally replied she was *Otomi*. María Luisa, a 50 years old high school history teacher, responded textbook style, stating she was *mestiza*. Interviewees also often made jokes when answering this question, inventing creative responses such as “I’m from the lost DFeña tribe.” I must, however, mention that interviewees responded differently to this question than in year 2000, when I carried out work for my MA in anthropology when most informants did not understand what I was asking. This time, ten years later I got a set of disorganized, rarely repetitive responses, but informants had a sense of my question. As I discuss in the following chapter, the central myth of *mestizaje* has progressively been left aside in Mexican nationalism, in order to embrace a plural and multicultural rhetoric since the late

1990s. The State now claims that Mexico is a multicultural nation. The circulation of such discourses in Mexico for the past ten years were palpable in the responses of interviewees, when I compare year 2000 with year 2010. All interviewees, with the exception of one Uruguayan informant, identified as Mexican.

As discussed in the introduction, interviewees were aged between 22 and 65 years old. Six women were aged between 22 and 29 years old. Thirteen were in their thirties. Twelve interviewees were in their forties and seven were in their fifties. Only two women were aged above 60 years old. For analytical purposes, I have divided interviewees in three generational cohorts. The youngest generation, below 40 years old, was born between 1970 and 1990 (19/40). Most women in their 30s began taking part in *el ambiente* in the 1990s and for women in their 20s in 2000s. This coincides with the moment in which debates on sexual citizenship, and in particular on LGBT rights, began taking place more intensely in the public sphere. Women of this generation saw early on how LGBT rights were brought to the legislative realm. They also had easier access to lesbian and queer cultural productions through magazines, books, plays and imported films sold on the streets of the city. Women in their 20s, in particular, came into *el ambiente* at a moment in which queer culture as a commodity was visible in the urban geography of Mexico City through areas such as La Zona Rosa. The generation in the middle was born between 1970 and 1950 (19/40). In 2010, they were aged between 40 and 60 years old. All women in their 50s, except for one began participating in *el ambiente* in the late 70s or early 80s. Interestingly, three women in their 40s found the networks of *el ambiente* in the 1980s, while the nine others did not visit queer places until the very late 80s or the 1990s. Some of the interviewees in their 50s participated in the

nascent gay and lesbian liberation movements in Mexico (but none were key leaders at that time). Lesbian and/or gay organizations were closely linked to the revolutionary struggles of the time. In fact, the first public appearance of the homosexual liberation movement in 1968 took place to celebrate the Cuban revolution (Lumsden 1992, Laguarda, 2009, de la Dehesa 2010). However, it is important to mention that lesbian organizations such as Oikabeth disappeared in the 1980s, and new groups such as El Clóset de Sor Juana or Musas de Metal, did not re-emerge until the mid-1990s. Women bars such as El Don existed all throughout the 1980s in the city. Women of this cohort lived most of their lives under the rule of the PRI that governed Mexico for 70 years, until year 2000. They completed most of their education prior to the 1990s, when Mexican nationalism promoted *mestizo* identity, rather than multiculturalism. The oldest generation was aged of 60 or older. I only found two women who belonged to this age group. While the lesbian and gay movement was beginning to get organized, it is likely that the networks of queer interaction were rather scarce. In the late 1970s, Alicia, now 65 years old, was in her mid-thirties. She was ten to fifteen years older than the younger women who were beginning to take part in lesbian organizations. Alicia had women partners, but she did not hear of the networks of *el ambiente* until the mid-1990s, when she visited El Clóset de Sor Juana. While Alicia became a doctor and Guadalupe, 63 years old, a lawyer, they both made clear that these were not always seen as acceptable professions for women at the time. The nascent feminist movement was beginning to address these issues as Alicia and Guadalupe began their professional lives.

Finally, it is important to remember that the context of the experience of a 41 year-old might be more similar than the one of a 38 year-old. In this sense, generational

cohorts should not be taken as absolute, but rather as a useful way to crystalize time and contrast experience over a long period of time.

Half of the interviewees (21) lived in a house with family members. In some cases, this meant living with parents and siblings, but in many others it meant living with members of the extended family as well (or instead). Four women were mothers, but only one of them lived with her son full time. Yazmín's son would live with her half of the week and in the case of Guadalupe and Martha their children were older and had moved out of their house. Motherhood was, therefore, a rare experience for the women in my sample. Nonetheless, some interviewees lived with their nephews and nieces and often played a significant role in their educations. Eleven of the interviewees lived by themselves, which is at odds with the patterns of cohabitation, since only 3.18% of individuals have reported not living with their families in the Federal District (INEGI, 2005). I myself was often asked by the women I interviewed (including the ones who lived by themselves), why I was not living with my family in Mexico. Clearly living by yourself or sharing a space with non-family members was a practice out of the norm. All of these women, except for two, were aged above 40 years old. In some case, the apartment or house of the interviewee was located right next door from family members. For example, María Luisa has her own apartment, but her mother lives in the apartment below and her brother on the first floor. In this sense, women who lived by themselves still had close interaction with family members, even if they lived alone. Five of the interviewees lived with their female partners (two of these formed a couple) and two others lived with their ex-partners and found themselves near a moment of transition. As I discuss in chapter 5, only Clara had contracted a civil union with her partner and no

interviewee was married to her female partner. None of the interviewees were married or living with a male partner at the moment of the interview, although two were divorced from a previous marriage with a man. Miranda had been married to a woman when she had lived her life as a male. One of the interviewees had been married to a gay man, for legal purposes in a foreign country.

It is rather difficult to advance that my sample is representative of all women participating in spaces of *el ambiente* in Mexico City. Representative samples are difficult to obtain for stigmatized populations, not to say impossible (Stein, 1997: 6). In brief, informants tended to be females, sustaining romantic or sexual relationships with women, they were middle-class and university educated. They had lived most of their lives in Mexico City's metropolitan area and they did not think of themselves in terms of ethnic identities. They were single in legal terms and they did not have children.

### **Research Tools and Interaction with Research Participants**

I principally used three methods of research: participant observation, interviews and the consultation of newspapers of wide circulation. I met informants through mainly two means: lesbian support groups or organizations and through circles of friendship I already had in the Federal District. Thereafter, I entered in contact with other potential research participants through snowball sampling. I spent several days a week in the company of informants, through the formal mean of interviews, participation in organizations or queer events, or simply hanging out as friends. I usually wrote partial notes right after the events and spent one or two afternoons a week writing a more extended version of my notes in cafés around the city. I spent time with old friends whom

I had often met through my previous fieldwork. I also met many new acquaintances, some of which developed into friendships. In terms of activities, they varied with friends. In the last months of fieldwork I met with Safi, once or twice a week to go run to the park of the *Viveros de Coyoacán*. I often met with Nadia in the colonial plaza of Coyoacán. We would get a coffee, a juice or a treat and just talk about life in general while we walked or sat on a bench in the plaza. Sometimes my old friend Astrid would call me to meet with her and a large group of her friends at a bar. I would talk with acquaintances in the group and catch up with Astrid on our lives. My life as a friend was not so different from what it has been in the past in other cities. In terms of new friendships, we considered each other friends, but I am not blind to the fact that our initial motives for approaching one another might have been on some levels different. Blackwood (1995) warns us on the use of the term “friend” in anthropological writing, which can mask the deep complexity of ethnographic relations. One of the particularities of participant observation and fieldwork in general is the fact that the researcher’s interpersonal relations are the primary mean for gathering data. These methods provide “significant analytical advantages as well as poignant dilemmas of ethics and social locations” (Amit, 2000: 2). While I acknowledge that research was the situation and/or motive through which I met many of these friends, I have learned that friendships or networks of affective support are essential through the process of fieldwork, as in everyday life. However, I cannot hide the fact that I listened and watched with a kind of attention characteristic of researchers and made notes of many of our interactions, a process that has not so much to do with friendship. For this reason, I attempted to be clear with people that I was also there doing research. On some occasions, such as in bars, I did some

observations where it was impossible for all the people to be aware of my activities. I regularly took notes but rarely in front of people. On some occasions I said that I liked an idea or a sentence and I mentioned to the person that I would like to make use of it for my dissertation. This was often done to underline what kind of observation I made since, even though I explained to people the concept of fieldwork, some still thought that I collected most of my information in dusty libraries.

The distinction between my identity as a researcher and a friend was probably most difficult when interacting with old friends. In those cases, I believe that I was consciously primarily a friend and secondarily a researcher. However, because they knew me better than other informants, they were the most aware of my identity as a researcher. They were the ones, who would more often say: “write this down for your research.” They were also the people I could go to if I had a question, and they would be willing to try providing their analysis on a particular social interaction.

When I began interviews, I started with two close friends, asking them to please comment on the questions. During interviews, I noticed that they were often more open than people I had just met and willing to tell stories in detail. They were also the most willing to tell me about their mistakes and the difficult situations they had been in; after all, we knew that we were not perfect. While there were some gray zones with long term friends, there was also more clarity about who we were and what we were doing in this time and place.

On a few occasions women approached me with other intentions than simply friendship. I nonetheless, deliberately had decided before fieldwork not to get involved in

any romantic or sexual relationships during research. I was involved in a long distance relationship, which I was determined to avoid complicating in any way. I also found myself at a point in my life in which I wanted to explore friendship. I questioned why we always speak of working on our “relationship,” and seldom on other kinds of relationships. Given my previous experiences in fieldwork in 2000, where I did not impose these limitations, I knew that romantic and/or sexual interests could significantly complicate human relationships during research and pose important ethical dilemmas. Particularly when relations did not work, this had the potential of foreclosing the door to a circle of informants. I must nonetheless confess that at times I became aware of mutual attraction, which led to platonic relations with a hint of erotic tension in our interaction. I do not think that sexual encounters must always be avoided during fieldwork, rather researchers must be reflexive of the kinds of interaction they sustain. Anthropologists have written on how sexuality and sexual practices form part of the dimensions of fieldwork (see Kulick and Wilson 1995, Browne and Nash 2010). In fact, researchers’ sexuality and sexual experiences significantly inform research. While I chose not to engage in sexual/romantic relationships with women participating in queer spaces in 2009-2010, I had had a long term partner in the past in Mexico and had dated during my early years in the city. These experiences that formed part of my life certainly influenced my perspectives on intimate relations in Mexico City.

Essential information was also gathered through 40 semi- structured interviews (see below for the list of participants and appendices for questionnaire). Before initiating formal questions, I first filled a written part with the interviewee on their socio-economic background (see annex). The first few questions focus on what the interviewee

remembers was said at home, at school and in the media about gender identities, love, friendship and sexuality. The second section discusses the role of friendship in the life of the interviewee. The third section opens a conversation on love, past formal and informal relationships. The fourth section contains questions on past and present spaces of *el ambiente* in Mexico City. Finally, the interview concludes with a few questions on lesbian cultural productions. Normally, on the day of the interview I presented the questionnaire to the participant before initiating the interview. Some women religiously followed the order of the questionnaire. However, many others were eager to tell me their story and ignored the organization of the questionnaire. I remember an interview on a Friday night, in crowded Coyoacán, where Quetzal spoke non-stop for half an hour, before I could reconnect with the questionnaire. In these situations, I let stories flow, because participants had heard beforehand the themes we were going to discuss and they generally spoke to those. When appropriate, I went back to specific questions that had not been discussed in a particular story. I attempted to cover most of the questions. The shortest interview lasted 44 minutes, while the longest lasted 2 hours and 43 minutes. In average, an interview would last one hour and a half. I recorded interviews on an audio-digital recorder. Most interviews took place in public spaces such as cafés, restaurants or parks. A few research participants invited me to their houses to complete the interview. Not all women felt free to speak on intimacy at home in front of their families with whom they often lived. People were usually more relaxed and opened to discuss in public spaces since it made the interview like an informal talk over coffee. Two of my long term friends completed the interview in my studio apartment. Every person was interviewed once. However, I had interviewed Mónica, Deborah, Luisa and Monserrat in year 2000.

Most of the questions I used in my previous research were different from this one, since my main focus had been on young women's sexual identities rather than on intimacy among three generations. As others questions remained the same, I envision returning to interviews completed ten years apart and develop a narrative on the ways in which the possibilities for queer lives have changed, in personal, political and social terms.

I also conducted five informal conversations with lesbian activists (Nadia Rosso, Rosa María Ávila, Lolkin Castañeda, Paulina Martínez, and Gloria Careaga). These conversations had the purpose to provide information on the current political and social climate in regards to LGBT issues in Mexico City. I wanted activists to help me understand what were in their opinions key LGBT issues at the moment, why most of the laws explicitly favoring LGBT rights (e.g. anti-discrimination, same-sex unions and reform on marriage law) had been taking place since the 1990s and how this had taken place. These conversations generally lasted for one hour. As activists were involved in different activities, they all provided different perspectives, although some of their narratives on social change coincided.

I also consulted newspapers of wide circulation. I initially had planned to conduct archival work on newspapers articles that discussed LGBT issues in *La Jornada*, *El Universal* and *Reforma* since the mid-1990s until the present. However, it became evident quickly in the course of fieldwork that conducting forty interviews, participant observation and taking daily notes was a full-time job in itself. I thus modified my goals and daily followed articles in *La Jornada* in 2009-2010. I often compared some of the news with the ones available through *El Universal* on-line. These articles were very useful to understand public discourses around LGBT issues in Mexico during the time of

fieldwork. As in conversations with activists, newspaper articles provided information on the macro context, while interviews with women participating in queer spaces provided the texture of everyday life.

### **Interview Participants**

In this section, I provide information about the 40 women I interviewed in Mexico City in 2009 and 2010. I indicate their age, their occupation, with whom the person lived, the social class of the neighborhood in which they lived and where I met the person. Interviewees chose their own names. Some of the names are pseudonyms. Other names correspond to the first name of the interviewee. Informants were informed that I would not add any last names, in case a third party did not want to appear in this dissertation. Any additional information I provide varies from person to person.

**Alicia** is 65 years old. She shares a house with her sister in *colonia* Postal (high social development). She is a psychiatrist. She identifies as lower middle class. She has lived in Mexico City most of her life. I met her in 2010 at Mujeres Mayores de 30.

**Alma** is 46 years old. She lives with her mother and nephew in Arinconada Cuacualco, Estado de México. She has an MA in education and teaches kinder garden. She identifies as middle class. She has lived in Mexico City and in Estado de México. I met her in 2010 at Musas de Metal.

**Ana** is 43 years old. She lives in *colonia* Ciudad Jardín (high social development) by herself. She identifies as middle class. She completed a BA and owns her own graphic design business. She lived most of her life in Montevideo, Uruguay, and moved to Mexico City in 2000. I met her in 2010 at GLU.

**Bellota** is 45 years old. She lives with her ex-partner in *colonia* José López Portillo (very low social development). She studied a nursing technique and had a stall at the market selling candy. She lived most of her life in Estado de México and moved to Mexico City 10 years ago. I met her at Mujeres Mayores de 30 in 2010.

**Clara** is 31 years old. She lives with her partner in *colonia* Ampliación Piloto Adolfo López Mateo (low social development). She owns and operates a pastry shop with her mother. She completed a BA and identifies as middle class. A friend suggested I interview her, but we had met before through a group of friends in 2003. She has lived in Mexico City most of her life, Guadalajara (1 year) and Los Cabos (1 year).

**Claudia** is 34 year old. She lives with her mother and father in *colonia* Primera Ampliación Santiago in Iztapalapa (very low social development). She lived most of her life with her parents in *delegación* Benito Juárez, the part of town with the highest social development. She is a gym trainer and an actress. She completed a BA and identifies as middle class. I met her in 2009 at the yoga group Shakti (Les Yoga). She has always lived in Mexico City.

**Claudia** is 23 years old. She lives with her mother, father and brother in *colonia* Agrícola Pantitlán (medium social development). She earned her BA in psychology and works at an NGO. She identifies as lower middle class. I met her in 2010 at Musas de Metal. She has lived all of her life in Mexico City.

**Daniela** is 34 years old. She lives by herself in *colonia* Piedad-Narvarte (high social development). She has a B.Sc. and is a computer engineer. She identifies as middle class. I met her in 2010 at Musas de Metal. She has lived most of her life in Mexico City, but

also in Aguascalientes, Cincinnati and Boston. She also identifies as a *trans* woman, and dates individuals of any gender.

**Deborah** is 32 years old. She lives with her aunt and uncle in *colonia* Roma Norte (medium social development). She is the administrator of a high end beauty parlor. She completed a BA and identifies as middle class. I met her in 2000 at El Clóset de Sor Juana. She lived for a year in New York City, but has lived the rest of her life in Mexico City.

**Diana** is 41 years old. She lives with her two brothers, father and niece in *colonia* Santa Ursula Coapa (low social development). She completed a BA and is a university librarian. She identifies as lower middle class. I met her in 2010 at Mujeres Mayores de 30. She has lived all of her life in Mexico City.

**Elrolloes** is 50 years old. She lives by herself in the *colonia* Alamos (high social development). She completed junior high school and promotes theatre plays. She identifies as lower middle class. I met her in 2010 at Musas de Metal. She has lived all of her life in Mexico City.

**Esther** is 25 years old. She lives with her parents in *colonia* Unidad Ejército Constitucionalista (low social development). She has studied tourism and gastronomy. She also attended Divinity School. She sells merchandise over the Internet. She has lived most of her life in Mexico City, but has also lived in Monterey, Guadalajara and Puerto Rico.

**Gabs** is 25 years old. She lives with her father, two brothers and sister in *colonia* Arenal (low social development). She works for an NGO and is completing her BA in

psychology at UNAM. She identified middle class. I met her in 2009 at GLU. She has lived all of her life in Mexico City.

**Grace** is 53 years old. She lives by herself in *colonia* Euzkadi (middle social development). She works as a family physician for the IMSS. She identifies as lower middle class. I met her at Musas de Metal in 2010. She lived in Tlaxcala for 3 years, and the rest of her life in Mexico City.

**Guadalupe** is 63 years old. She lives by herself in *colonia* Jardín Balbuena (high social development). She is a lawyer. She identifies as middle class. I initially met her in 2009 at the bookstore Voces en Tinta, and later asked if I could interview her when I saw her at Mujeres Mayores de 30. Guadalupe is the only informant who identified herself as indigenous, more specifically Otomi.

**Liliana** is 33 years old. She lives with her mother in *colonia* Tlatilco (medium social development). She works as a clerk at a small company. She completed a degree in accounting. She identifies as middle class. I met her through a friend at a bar, Cabaret Tito, in 2010. She has always lived in Mexico City.

**Luisa** is 31 years old. She lives with her partner Yvonne in *colonia* Moctezuma (middle social development). She has a BA and works as a representative for an advertisement agency. She identified as middle class. I met her in 2000 at El Clóset de Sor Juana. She has lived all of her life in Mexico City.

**Lydia** is 49 years old. She lives by herself in *colonia* Doctores (middle social development). She has a BA and is a sociologist. She identified as middle class. I met her in 2010 at Mujeres Mayores de 30. She was born in Mazatlán, but she moved to Mexico City in her childhood. She also lived in Los Angeles, USA for almost a decade.

**Martha** is 48 years old. She lives by herself. She completed *preparatoria* school (high school). She described herself as a *comerciante* (seller). She identified as working class. I met her in 2010 through Grace. She has lived most of her life in Mexico City, but was based in Tampico, Guadalajara, Michoacán, Veracruz and Puebla for short periods of her life.

**Martha** is 54 years old. She lives by herself in one of the *colonia* Narvarte (high social development). She took some undergraduate courses in college. She is retired from a clerical position in the federal government and is a student in alternative medicine. She identifies as middle class. She has lived all of her life in Mexico City. I met her in 2010 at Mujeres Mayores de 30.

**María Luisa** is 50 years old. She lives by herself in an apartment. She lives in the *colonia* Colina del Sur (high level of development). She is a history teacher in junior high (*secundaria*). She identifies as middle class. She always lived in Mexico City. We met at Shakti (Les Yoga), the lesbian yoga group in 2009.

**María Teresa** is 44 years old. She lives with her brother and aunt. She completed high school and sells clothes at the market on weekends. She identifies as lower middle class. She has lived all of her life in San Marcos Tultitlan, Estado de México. I met her at Musas de Metal in 2010.

**Miranda** is 40 years old. She lives with her parents in Ciudad Satélite, Estado de México, which is generally associated with the middle and upper classes. She identifies as upper middle class. She is a soccer coach and completed a BA. She lived a few years of her adult life in Veracruz, but the rest of her life in Mexico City and Estado de México. She identifies as a trans woman and as a lesbian. I met her in 2010 through Monserat.

**Mónica** is 38 years old. She lives with her ex-partner in *colonia* San José Insurgentes, a *colonia* of high social development. She is the executive director of her own communications consulting firm. She completed a BA in communication studies. She identifies as middle class. I met Mónica in 2001 at a lesbian group called Mujeres Azules, which does not meet anymore. She lived for a year in Toronto and Montreal Canada, but has lived the rest of her life in Mexico City.

**Monserat** is 31 years old. She lived with her partner, father and mother in *colonia* Merced-Balbuena (low social development). She operated a small business of prepared meals from home. She took some undergraduate courses. She identifies as upper-middle class. She lived part of her childhood in Guadalajara. We met in 2000 at El Clóset de Sor Juana.

**Patricia** is 39 years old. She lives with her mother in one of the *colonias* Pedregal San Nicolas in Tlalpan (low or very low social development). She has a BA in computer science and works in her field for IBM. She identifies as middle class. She lived part of her childhood in *Estado de México*. We met at Shakti (Les Yoga), the lesbian yoga group in 2009.

**Patricia** is 46 years old. She lives with her partner in *colonia* Tlalpan (high social development). She is a dentist. She identifies as upper middle class. I had been acquainted with her through Mónica's friend circle since 2001, but we had never spoken before the interview. She has lived all of her life in Mexico City.

**Roman-Diez** is 40 years old. She lives with her sister and niece in *colonia* Colina del Sur (high social development). She is a graphic designer and is starting an MA. She identifies

as middle class. She has always lived in Mexico City. I met her at Musas de Metal in 2010.

**Pinacea** is 33 years old. She is a doctoral student in biology. She lived with her mother and brother in *colonia* San Bartolo Ameyalco (low social development). She identified as lower middle class. I met her in 2009 at GLU. She had lived all of her life in Mexico City.

**Quetzal** is 43 years old. She lives with her son in *colonia* Ajusco (low social development). She has an MA in biology and works for a government agency. She identified as lower middle class. I met her at Musas de Metal in 2010. She has lived all of her life in Mexico City and a few years in Estado de México.

**Safi** is 34 years old. She lives by herself in the *colonia* Reynosa Tamaulipas (low social development). She is a math teacher at a *preparatoria* (high school). She identifies as middle class. I met her in 2010 at Musas de Metal, but I was introduced to her through Grace. She lived most of her life in Jalapa, Veracruz, and moved for work to Mexico City in 2003.

**Sandra** is 51 years old. She lives by herself in a *colonia* she described as residential and calm (exact name unavailable) in the South of Mexico City. She identifies as upper middle class. She is the owner of a lesbian club. I met her in 2010 through Grace. She has lived all of her life in Mexico City.

**Sandra** is 39 years old. She lives with her partner in *colonia* Industrial (high social development). She is an undergraduate student. I met her in 2010 at Musas de Metal. She has lived in Mexico City, Cancún, Cozumel, Mérida and Amsterdam.

**Selene** is 23 years old. She lives with her parents and a brother in *colonia* Ajusto in Coyoacán (low social development). She is a student in history at UNAM. She identified as lower middle class. I met her in 2009 at GLU. She has lived all of her life in Mexico City.

**Selva** is 55 years old. She lives by herself in *colonia* Santa Fe (high social development). She is a retired high school teacher and described herself as a care giver for her mother who lives next door. She identifies as middle class. I met her at Mujeres Mayores de 30. She has lived all of her life in Mexico City.

**Tania** is 29 years old. She lives with her mother and grandfather in Aragón (the *colonia* was not further specified). She described it as violent and loud. She completed a BA and is a training manager at a transnational corporation. She identifies as middle class. I met her at Musas de Metal in 2010. She has lived all of her life in Mexico City.

**Teresa** is 42 years old. She lives with her mother and sister in *colonia* Villa de Aragón (medium social development). She completed some courses in high school. She is a factory worker. She identifies as working class (*baja* in her own words). I met her at Mujeres Mayores de 30 in 2010. She has lived her life between Mexico City and Estado de México.

**Yazmín** is 51 years old. She lives by herself and with her son for half of the week. Her apartment is located in *colonia* La Esmeralda (middle social development). She completed high school and is the manager's assistant at a small company. She identifies as middle class. I met her at Musas de Metal in 2010. She grew up in a small town of Jalisco's State and moved to Mexico City when she was 16 years old.

**Yolitzin** is 22 years old. She lives with her father, mother and brother in Ecatepec, Estado de México. She is an undergraduate student in psychology. She identifies as middle class. I met her at GLU in 2010. She has lived all of her life in Estado de México.

**Yvonne** is 38 years old. She lives with her partner in *colonia* Moctezuma (middle social development). She had a technical degree in social work. She owned a fried chicken stall business at the market. She identified as lower middle class. I met her in 2010 through her partner, Luisa. She has lived all of her life in Mexico City.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have discussed the setting and the methods I have used to produce ethnographic work. I have situated the confines of the field within Mexico City's metropolitan area. More precisely, my research took place in *el ambiente*, which I define as "a circuit of sexual, symbolic or material exchanges that congregates in visible spaces associated with queer lives such as clubs, bars, lesbian groups and in more hidden and spontaneous places such as around soccer leagues, living rooms, parks, etc." I have discussed the methods I used to conduct ethnographic fieldwork, including participant observation, 40 interviews with women who participate in *el ambiente*, 5 interviews with activists and the review of articles regarding sexual citizenship in newspapers of record in 2009-2010. Finally I provided information on interviewees who participated in this research. My goal was to clarify the process through which ethnographic knowledge was produced to engage with the research question: How have the social organization, discourses and practices of intimacy shifted for women participating in queer communities in Mexico City since the 1960s?

### Chapter 3

#### Producing Mexican Sexualities and Histories is Mexican Nationalism

In June 2010, I took part in the 32<sup>nd</sup> pride parade in Mexico City where I walked along Reforma Avenue with 400,000 other individuals. At twelve o'clock, the crowd was gathering. I walked through this sea of bodies to find my friends from the group Musas de Metal around the statue of the *Ángel de la Independencia*, which was the point of meeting. I recognized the usual massive trucks you see at pride parades packed with muscular dancers, ready for the rumba marathon. Further along, some women were carrying signs displaying demands such as “¡No a la lesbofobia!” Teenagers, waiting around, sprinkled each other playfully with water guns. While I looked for my friends, I noticed a large amount of men and women dressed with sombreros and tight black *charro* outfits, as early 20<sup>th</sup> century revolutionaries. This would have been rather unusual for a pride parade in Mexico City if it had not been entitled *La Marcha del Bicentenario* (The bicentennial march).

Across the Americas, Colombia, Chile, Argentina, Venezuela and Mexico were celebrating their 200 years of independence. For Mexico, two key events that have shaped the nation were commemorated: Independence (1810) and the Mexican Revolution (1910). In 2010, the State organized various commemorative events. The public protested heavy spending in the middle of another economic crisis. At the same time, alternative narratives on Mexican history were offered by various groups of organized citizens. *La marcha del bicentenario* is an example of it. In the middle of this national celebration, the question of history and Mexican national identity lingered in the air in the country and perhaps beyond its borders. Why were participants of the sexual

diversity movement invested in taking part in the bicentennial celebration? What urge possessed them to appear dressed up as revolutionaries on that Saturday morning to reenact Mexican “official” history?

A few decades ago, studies on nationalism and homosexuality suggested that these two notions formed an awkward pair (Mosse, 1985). While the contradictions among homosexuality, women and nationalism have been well documented (see for example Alexander 1994, Kaplan, Alarcon and Moallem 1999, Nagel 1998, Enloe, 2000), recent studies propose instead that certain nationalisms produce non-normative sexualities (Puar 2007, Scott 2009). As Puar has suggested, nations do not exclusively produce heteronormative systems, but some “are productive of non-normative sexualities, not merely repressive of them” (Puar, 2007: 50). In Mexico, “new” sexual norms have become tangible in the public sphere. In *Queering the Public Sphere*, Rafael de la Dehesa (2010) discusses how activists in Mexico and Brazil have brought their demands, often successfully, to the terrain of legislative politics. In Mexico, it is constitutionally prohibited to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation since March 2011. The Supreme Court has approved same-sex marriage in the Federal District. Mexico is also a signatory of few international treaties that forbid discrimination based on sexual orientation. In this panorama, is Mexican national identity still centered on heterosexism? While multiple paths might be travelled to respond such a broad question, I want to suggest that a change takes place in Mexico in the 1990s in what regards sexual normativity, precisely at the moment in which the central myth of *mestizaje* is left aside in Mexican nationalism, in order to embrace a plural and multicultural rhetoric of national identity. In this national redefinition, the relationship to the rest of the world also

changes in the so called era of globalization, economic liberalization and a certain effort towards democratization. As in many other parts of the continent, legislation addressing LGBT rights point towards a growing conversation on forms of intimacy to be socially legitimated.

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which Mexican nationalism produces non-normative sexualities. More particularly, I discuss the production of sexualities in the shift from *mestizaje* to multiculturalism. In 'The Sexual Citizen' (1999), Jeffrey Weeks suggests that broad social transformations have created the preconditions for the figure of the sexual citizen to emerge in the West. Following Giddens (1992), Weeks suggests that the democratization of relationships; new subjectivities and new stories have created the sexual citizen. He emphasizes the necessity to look at the broader social and cultural situation to understand the emergence of this citizen. Aligned with such reflections, what are the conditions that create the sexual citizen in Mexico? Or, to put it in another way, what are the conditions that create the present debates on sexual citizenship in Mexico? Various studies in the anthropology of intimacy and sociology would point to the conditions brought by modernity and capitalism, as Hirsch affirms, for the Mexican case (2007). While the impact of coalitional work, particularly between feminists and the LGBT movement, has been well documented to explain recent opening towards LGBT rights (De la Dehesa, 2010), we have yet to fully recognize the unintended consequences of the shift to multiculturalism as it impacts the work of other movements, such as the EZLN and global trends developing during the fin de siècle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I suggest that the shift towards multiculturalism explains in part the ascension of the present sexual citizen. The fact that debates on sexual citizenship have filled the public sphere and

certain citizens are being “normalized” in the shift does not mean evidently that national membership has opened its doors to all. While certain bodies are normalized, others remain peripheral or become further marginalized

The first section of this chapter briefly looks at the writings of Octavio Paz to address *mestizaje*. It further looks at interviews with five lesbian activists, and some quotes from the 40 interviews I conducted with women who participate in queer spaces. In addition, I review some of the secondary literature on Mexican nationalism.

After looking at the ascension of the sexual citizen in the shift, from *mestizaje* to multiculturalism, that largely took place at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I examine the production of sexualities through two central events that directly touched on sexual citizenship at the time of fieldwork in 2009-2010: the discussions on same-sex marriage and the celebration of the bicentennial. I chose these two events because they were the most visible. It would have been almost impossible for a Mexico City inhabitant to be unaware of these two issues in 2009-2010.

### **The shifting terrain of Mexican nationalism**

In her article “Patriotic thoughts or intuition: roles of women in Mexican nationalisms,” Gutiérrez Chong (2006) suggests that there have been three types of nationalism in Mexico since the colonial encounter. The first type of nationalism developed around Mexico’s wars of independence in 1809. This nationalism was articulated around the Creole population’s interest in government control. Far more ink has been spent on the second type of nationalism, which emerged in the early 20<sup>th</sup>

century, shortly after the 1910 revolution and, which holds the myth of *mestizaje* at its center. More recently, scholars such as Gutierrez Chong (2006, 2007), De la Peña (2006) and Chorba (2007) have begun writing about early 21<sup>st</sup> century nationalism, built around multiculturalism, pluriethnicity and neoliberalism. In this section, I ask the questions: How did the shift from *mestizaje* to multiculturalism open space for a conversation on sexual citizenship? What kinds of sexualities are produced in the era of multicultural nationalism? While I briefly look at *mestizaje* in order to grasp the contrast between the two periods, I principally concentrate on the production of sexualities in the era of Mexican multicultural nationalism, as this focus remains unexplored.

#### *Mestizaje and sexualities*

For most of last century, Mexican nationalists defined the nation as mestizo. In the writings of Mexican ideologues such as Molina Enriquez, José Vasconcelos, Samuel Ramos, Manuel Gamio and Octavio Paz, it was suggested in one way or another that Mexicans descended from Spaniards and indigenous peoples. This idea was widely state sponsored, through a single mandatory education system, mass media and the arts. In urban centers, the State generated a visual culture through murals, architecture and public spaces, which recounted the creation myth of the Mexican nation (Alonso, 2004).

Mestizo nationalism was largely sponsored by the PRI, the political party that ruled Mexico for seventy years, until the elections in year 2000. During the presidential regime of Miguel Alemán (1946-1952), Mexican nationalism embraced the country's economy. For President Alemán, mexicanidad also included pride in national production and consumption (Gauss, 2010: 3). Important protectionist measures were imposed by the Federal State, in an attempt to stimulate the growth of Mexican industry. Starting with

Salinas de Gortari, who became Mexico's President in 1988, the country underwent a shift by adopting a series of neoliberal reforms. These reforms included "the widespread privatization of state industries, the revision of the Mexican constitution to help ensure the property rights of foreign investors, and the lifting of protectionist trade barriers under the North American Free Trade Agreement" (Babb, 2001: 1).

The myth of *mestizaje* makes an explicit statement on race and sexuality. The idea of reproduction between indigenous and Spaniards to create a "new" race lies at its center. For Vasconcelos (1925), the reproduction of a *raza cósmica*, points towards a progression towards whiteness and 'civilization.' As another nationalist intellectual, Octavio Paz (1950) narrated it, the primal moment of the encounter between the "two" cultures is a turbulent encounter, marked by (sexual) violence. *The Labyrinth of Solitude* is perhaps the text in the period of *mestizo* nationalism that makes more clearly reference to sex and sexuality, which is why I consider it here. Paz describes the encounter between the *chingón*, the masculine, active, closed figure and the *chingada*, the feminine, passive and open character. As he puts it: "The *chingón* is the macho, the male; he rips open the *chingada*, the female, who is pure passivity, defenseless against the exterior world. The relationship between them is violent, and it is determined by the cynical power of the first and the impotence of the second" (Paz, 1985[1950]: 77). In other passages, Paz clearly associates the masculine principle with the figure of the conquistador and the feminine one with La Malinche.<sup>5</sup> In producing gender, race is simultaneously produced, using the metaphor of a colonial past. In this passage heterosexual relations rely on violence and

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<sup>5</sup> It is said that la Malinche was a Nahuatl woman who became mistress and translator for Hernan Cortes (A Spaniard who led the Spanish crown mission to occupy Mexican territory)

domination. Relations between men may also be perceived as violent. As Mckee (2003) signals Paz discusses the place of *albur*<sup>6</sup> (a double entendre) in men's relations as a potential site of symbolic violation. In the world of male same-sex sexuality, the words *activo* (active) and *pasivo* (passive), literally echo Paz' vocabulary on sexuality attached to the masculine and feminine principles. In such model, female same-sex sexuality constitutes impossibility, as how would two passive figures engage in any relation. The national figures generated in Paz leave aside the lesbian character from national mythology. She is not the only absent figure. Mestizaje does not enable complex thinking on the plurality of class, gender and ethnicity in the nation-state (Gutmann, 1992). The Mexican chronicler Carlos Monsiváis considers that the unitary character of nationalism is not only a question of ethnicity, but national types makes national men and women and those do not leave room to pluralism (Audiffred, 2000). The idea of claiming any identity challenging national types becomes then a particularly difficult task in such a unitary context.

While the myth of *mestizaje* provided little room for same-sex sexuality in social imaginaries, and even less for female same-sex sexuality, during this period same-sex sexuality was not State sanctioned. Almost no law made reference to homosexuality in Mexico in the 1970s with the exception of Article 201 of the penal code, which dictated a prison sentence to anyone who engaged in sexual relations with a minor. The sentence increased five to ten years if it involved "homosexual practice." The term "homosexual practice" was removed from the law in 1998. Despite the relative silence in regards to same-sex sexuality, lesbians and gays were subject to daily police extortion in the past,

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<sup>6</sup> An *albur* is a double-entendre. One of the meanings often has a sexual connotation.

under Mexico City civil code, which permitted to detain anyone who was perceived to offend public decency (Careaga 1997, Laguarda 2010). In this sense, Lydia, an interviewee remembers having been harassed and held at gun point by a police officer for kissing her girlfriend in a park in the 1980s. While homophobia certainly persists in Mexico, some laws nowadays address LGBT rights. I explore how these changes are entangled with the production of a shifting national identity in the past decade and a half.

*The shift to multicultural nationalism*

The election of lesbian activist Patria Jiménez and the first Forum on Sexual Diversity and Human Rights in the Federal District Assembly in 1998 “marked a symbolic turning point in activists’ relations with the legislative field” (De la Dehesa, 2010: 147). It is at this point and thereafter that the adoption and conversations on anti-discrimination laws, civil unions, same-sex marriage and adoption, queer-friendly city projects began. If the mid-nineties is in some sense our point of departure, we might want to ask what was happening at the time. Which conditions enabled these broad conversations on intimacy to emerge in the public sphere? Situating our analysis in Mexico, 1994 unavoidably comes to mind. In this regard, Mexican scholar Marisa Belausteguigoitia (2009: 12) writes: “We are another country since 1994. I’m referring to the importance of the rebellion initiated by the EZLN, on January 1 1994, the day in which NAFTA initiated. The undeniable racial discrimination we exercise exploded in our faces...”<sup>7</sup> For several decades, racial and ethnic diversity had been clouded by the national myth of a mestizo nation. Paradoxically, racial discrimination had been present in practice all along. The challenge to mestizo identity became very evident in the 1994

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<sup>7</sup> My translation.

conflict of Chiapas, where the widely broadcasted EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional/Zapatista Army of National Liberation) introduced the idea of diversity (Earle, 1994). In 2001, the country was declared multicultural and pluriethnic in its Constitution, marking a broad shift from mestizaje to multiculturalism. I perceive a connection between this change of nationalist regime and the opening of a conversation on sexual citizenship.

The passage to multiculturalism had been on its way since 1991. While indigenous organizations had been active in the country for several decades, the ratification of ILO's published Convention 169 promoted changes in article 4 of the Constitution in 1991 (De la Peña, 2006). The new text said that "Mexico is a multicultural nation based originally upon its indigenous people" (cited in De la Peña, 2006: 287). It is not until 2001, however, that this passage characterized as nebulous for not defining "pueblos" (people) was clarified. By that time, the EZLN had become a visible force in national politics. Article 2, which affirmed that Mexico was a multicultural country in the 2001 Constitution, resonated with public debates around pluriethnicity. The demands of various groups, in concert with the political and economic climate, have led to define plurality around various categories. Article 1 of the Mexican constitution now specifies since 2001 that "it is prohibited to discriminate on the basis of ethnic origin, nationality, gender, age, disabilities, social conditions, health conditions, religion, opinions, preferences, civil status or any other basis that challenge human dignity."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Mexican Constitution as published on May 7, 2008, see at <http://www.diputados.gob.mx/LeyesBiblio/pdf/1.pdf>

While the path towards change took place in a context in which discussion around ethnicity were at the center of the national issues, other categories were affected as well in this context. I do not want to suggest that the transition in the nationalist rhetoric is the only factor that opened a space for discussions on sexual citizenship. Evidently, women's and feminist movements, LGBT movements and youth movements among others, had had a notable presence in the country since the 1970s. However, this underexplored path requires further investigation, as changes in sexual citizenship coincide with this transformative moment in national identity. How did the shift to multiculturalism open space for a conversation on sexual citizenship? What kinds of sexualities were produced in this shift to multiculturalism?

*Multicultural nationalism in conversation with sexual citizenship*

Here, I discuss how the shift to multiculturalism opened space for a conversation on sexual citizenship. In a conversation, activist Lolkin Castañeda suggested that legislative changes that have taken place in the past decades, in favor of LGBT rights, relate to a new movement strategy that took force in the 1990s:

Entonces, una cosa que sí fue muy importante es que en ese momento, en 1998 me parece, se lleva a cabo la primera semana de diversidad sexual en la asamblea legislativa. Entonces es como esa posibilidad de pensar de ahí. En términos de derecho. O sea, la semana cultural ya tenía muchos años de organizarse y era un espacio donde se hablaba de política, de cultura, había exposiciones muestras y demás...Entonces, bueno en ese momento, desde la cámara de diputados, se comienzan a evidenciar legislativamente las necesidades de las lesbianas y de los homosexuales.

An important thing at that moment, in 1998 I believe, is that the first Forum on Sexual Diversity and Human Rights in the Federal District Assembly took place. So a possibility to think from there, in terms of rights [emerged]. The cultural week [on sexual diversity] had been organized for many years. It was a space where politics, culture, exhibits,

shows and more were discussed... But at that moment, from the legislative assembly, the needs of lesbians and homosexuals began to be evidenced.

While these concrete events influenced legislations to come affecting LGBT rights, Castañeda also believed that broader changes were highly influenced by various social movements and organizations, in particular the Zapatistas. As she suggested further:

[El movimiento LGBT] no tenía la importancia suficiente como para generar una modificación en el Artículo 1 constitucional. El movimiento Zapatista, sí. Y tenía mirada internacional. Justo acompañando ese proceso, o sea todas las organizaciones de derechos humanos, los observadores por la paz, los movimientos de mujeres, los movimientos feministas, los grupos estudiantiles. O sea había ahí todo una serie de estructura social acompañando este proceso.

[The LGBT movement] was not important enough to promote change for Article 1 in the constitution. The Zapatista movement was. And it was in the eyes of the international community... There were human rights organizations, peace observers, women's movements, feminist movements, students groups. There was a social structure walking along the process.

It is in this panorama that the Federal government called on to the formation of a citizen commission to work on a Federal law against discrimination, which gave birth to the National Commission to Prevent and Eradicate Discrimination (CONAPRED). However, before the citizen commission finalized its work in 2003 with the creation of CONAPRED, the modification of Article 1 in the Constitution was first discussed in a closed door meeting in the Senate. Rafael De la Dehesa describes these events:

In a closed-door meeting in the Senate to approve a reform of the country's laws on indigenous communities- an attempt to push through measures in response to the San Andrés Agreements in the Chiapas conflict... Senator Leticia Ochoa (PRD) proposed the introduction of "sexual orientation" as well as a stipulation that the State should take steps to enforce anti-discrimination, basing her argument on the presidential commission work and international standards (De la Dehesa, 2010: 159).

As this quote suggests, a discussion on legal matters<sup>9</sup> touching directly indigenous communities, created space to envision anti-discrimination measures based on “sexual orientation.” The recognition of an ethnic plurality opened the door to consider plurality in other fields. Explicit arguments, however, considered international politics, as well as local work. The presidential commission referred at in the quote above refers to the Citizens Commission on Studies Against Discrimination that was responsible to elaborate an anti-discrimination Federal law. In an informal discussion with activist Gloria Careaga, who participated in this Commission, it became evident that discussions on a form of discrimination were rarely restricted to this only form of discrimination. Categories represented as separate in the law “contaminated” one another in terms of the analysis that led to produce the law. As she recalls:

Ahí tuvimos muchas discusiones...estaba gente de antropología que decían que las razas ya no existen más, que ese debate ya está superado. Yo dije pues también, “el sexo” ya no existe. Estamos en el mismo lugar... Los antropólogos dicen que el concepto de raza ya no existe porque ya se reconoció... que todas las personas tenemos la misma composición. Digo, sí pero el racismo existe. ¿Y eso cómo se llama? Entonces si no metemos raza, o si no metemos sexo pues pareciera que ya libramos esa igualdad. El hecho que formalmente ya se reconozca por la ciencia, no quiere decir que ya se rompió, con el estigma y con el prejuicio. Entonces, eso fue un debate, muy, muy fuerte...

We had many discussions... people from anthropology... were saying that races do not exist anymore, that we were over this debate. I said: “well neither does “sex”, so we are at the same place”... Anthropologists say that the concept of race does not exist anymore because we have recognized ... that all people have the same composition. I say yes, but racism exists! And how do you call that? So if we do not include race, if we do not include sex, well it will seem like we have gained the battle for

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<sup>9</sup> Los Acuerdos de San Andrés or San Andrés Accords are agreements that were signed by the EZLN and the Mexican government on February 16, 1996. The agreements granted autonomy and rights to the indigenous communities. The PRI however ignored the agreements and strongly militarized the South of Mexico.

equality. The fact that it is recognized by science does not mean that we are over prejudices. So that was a very intense debate...

While categories might appear separate in Article 1 and the Federal Law to eliminate and eradicate discrimination the production process reveals a different angle.<sup>10</sup> As Careaga points out, discussions on “race,” were not separate from other terms such as sex that were considered for Article 1. Careaga reminded anthropologists that not only science constructed categories, but larger power relations that gave place to racism and sexism. In this process, single categories cannot be considered to be contained in closed doors particular kinds of sexualities were produced.

The ways in which sexuality fits into Mexican nationalism under the myth of *mestizaje* is more easily discerned than under multiculturalism. It is evident that the idea of mixed reproduction is central to the formation of the nation. In multiculturalism, the threads between sexuality and nationalism might be more difficult to discern. As anthropologist Peter Wade suggests:

[M]estizaje places sexual-racial relations at the centre of concepts of the nation and its social order... With multiculturalism the role of sexuality may seem less obvious: the image here is of separate ‘cultural’ groups who reproduce themselves sexually, but do not necessarily mix (Wade 2009: 216).

Multiculturalism produces an imagined mosaic community of separate different ethnic groups. The central idea of mixture, so present in *mestizaje*, gets replaced by one of separate communities that do not intermingle with one another and are managed by their

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<sup>10</sup> The category “race” is not included in the constitution. Instead the commission kept “ethnicity” around which there was more consensus.

“own normative systems” (usos y costumbres).<sup>11</sup> Each group is represented to have its own set of norms, including in the field of gender and sexuality.<sup>12</sup> In Wade’s description sexuality is labeled as reproductive. Nonetheless, in the era of multicultural nationalism sexuality is not only imagined along the lines of reproductive heterosexuality.

The notion of “sexual preference” that forms part of Article 1 suggests a plurality of sexualities. However, it is important to highlight that this category was ambiguously pushed aside in the Mexican constitution until March 2011. More precisely, the visibility of the plurality of “sexual preferences” remained half hidden, as the nation did not discriminate against “preferences.” The Constitutional text did not specify the kind of “preferences” it was forbidden to discriminate against. The events of this process of marginalization are well known by Mexican LGBT activists as the story was shared in many occasions. Careaga provided these details:

Y después entramos en el debate de si deberíamos llamarlo orientación sexual o preferencia sexual... ganaron ellos y quedó “preferencia sexual,” para nuestra desfortuna... entonces cuando llego a la cámara de diputados, hubo una discusión pero no fue muy grande. Al final se aprobó, se mandó al Senado. Cuando llegó al Senado, ahí estaba este hombre Fernández de Cevallos de Senador, y es el cuando precisamente dice, “es imposible, que en el primer artículo de nuestra constitución este la palabra sexual.” Y esa era toda su argumentación, no había ningún otro fundamento, simplemente “sexual” le parecía terrible. Y entonces lo que hacen es quitar la palabra sexual. Si tú revisas el artículo primero, dice solamente “preferencias,” entonces nos desaparecieron.

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<sup>11</sup> “Usos y costumbres” may be translated as customs and traditions. The term refers to indigenous customary law.

<sup>12</sup> Indigenous communities are at times represented as tolerant towards same-sex sexuality, as in the famous case of Oaxacan communities that accommodate “muxes”. The EZLN, recognized the need to include sexual diversity in its demands. In fact, on several occasions interviewees pointed out to me that this was due to the fact that a few LGBT Mexican activists were in active dialogue with the EZLN in the late 1990s. In an informal conversation in August 2010 activist Gloria Careaga shared that in international EZLN peace camps, there were always a couple of rainbow pride flags.

...We began debating if we should call it “sexual orientation” or “sexual preference” [at the Citizens Commission on Studies Against Discrimination]... Unfortunately, they won and “sexual preference” remained. So they had a discussion at the legislative assembly but not very important. In the end they approved of it and sent it to Senate. In the Senate there was this man Senator Fernández de Cevallos and that is exactly when he says: “It is impossible to have the word ‘sexual’ in Article 1 of our Constitution.” And that was all of his argument. There were no other foundations for it. “Sexual” simply seemed terrible to him. So he removes the word sexual. If you look at Article 1, it only says “preferences,” so they disappeared us.

By removing the term “sexual” from “sexual preference,” Careaga suggests that the discrimination suffered by the gay and lesbian population in Mexico was unacknowledged. Paulina Martínez, leader of the queer women group Musas de Metal, similarly voiced that “*La ley se puede interpretar, pero no poner eso era como de impedir que se reconozca que existe homofobia, como una constante/* The law can be interpreted, but that was like not recognizing that homophobia exists on every day basis.” Senator Fernandez de Cevallos had previously been a presidential candidate for the PAN<sup>13</sup> in 1994. When asked during his campaign how he was going to address the AIDS epidemic, he responded “I have not thought about it, this is the problem of fags” (Monsiváis, 2010: 3). Clearly, Fernández de Cevallos was not sympathetic to the LGBT population. The PAN has in fact been known as a conservative party when it comes to questions of sexuality. Nevertheless, it is interesting to notice that Fernández de Cevallos takes his whole crusade against the word “sexual” rather than the category “sexual preference.” The nation, particularly in its Article 1, must be represented as asexual, free of any reference suggesting that Mexicans fornicate. In an effort to sanitize the nation the Mexican constitution forbid the discrimination of people for their “preferences.” By

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<sup>13</sup> PAN: Partido de Acción Nacional

keeping half of the term (preferences) in the Constitution, for 10 years the nation displayed its ambiguous relationship with non-normative sexualities. Until 2011, it did not entirely exclude the category, but it did not clearly pronounce itself against homophobia. Some advancement in Mexican legislation first took place in the Federal Law to Prevent and Eliminate Discrimination<sup>14</sup> approved in 2003, in which Article 4 states that it is prohibited to discriminate based on “sexual preferences.”

*The influence of global trends*

With the advent of multiculturalism, room is made to think of a plurality of “sexual preferences.” This affirmation was, however, not made at the forefront, at the constitutional level, and this was noticed within Mexico and beyond its borders. Following the events of 1994, the global “gaze” becomes important to the nation. In the late 1990s, many Mexicans feared “the effects that globalization might have on national Mexican identity,” as the title of a book of cartoons, *How to Survive Neoliberalism and Still Be Mexican*, illustrates (Chorba 2007: 160). In the era of NAFTA, the porosity of Mexican borders is redefined in relation to trade and Mexicans out of the country who may acquire double-citizenship and vote. While multiculturalism was primarily thought of in relation to indigenous groups, it was also thought of in terms of communities across borders. For example, the “Mexico Multicultural Nation Program” at the National Autonomous University of Mexico has “included two new subjects in the list of studies

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<sup>14</sup> Ley Federal para Prevenir y Eliminar la Discriminación, 2003.

on interculturality: “Afro-America: the third root” and, more recently, “Immigration and cultural diversity: the Mexicans the world gave us.”<sup>15</sup>

When I asked activists why laws favoring LGBT rights had been approved in the past decade, they consistently mentioned the influence of global forces and international agreements.<sup>16</sup> Nadia Rosso, of the *Grupo Lésbico Universitario*, suggests that global trends have been expressed at an institutional level, but also in terms of cultural productions. As she says:

Desde que empezó el movimiento homosexual en España y EU, hubo intercambio con los movimientos en México... Actualmente tú prendes la tele o escuchas el radio y puedes escuchar noticias de todo el mundo y saber qué está pasando... el acceso a las películas de todo el mundo cuestan 20 pesos para las personas que no tienen acceso a comprarse una película de 400 pesos importada... estas manifestaciones artísticas son muy importantes...

Since the beginning of homosexual movements in Mexico, there was an exchange with movements in the US and Spain... At the moment, when you turn on the TV or listen to the radio you can listen to the news from all around the world and know what is happening... access to [pirate] movies cost 20 pesos for people who can't afford imported movies that cost 400 pesos... these artistic manifestations are very important...

As Rosso suggests information and cultural productions from around the world are accessible to most Mexico City inhabitants across class. While transnational processes are certainly expressed in everyday life activities, the rhetoric and mechanisms of international organizations are certainly immersed in cross-border interaction. The influence of human rights and conventions that point towards sexual diversity, were

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<sup>15</sup> See program description at: [www.nacionmulticultural.unam.mx](http://www.nacionmulticultural.unam.mx)

<sup>16</sup> When I asked activists why laws favoring LGBT rights had been approved in the past few years, some mentioned the national political climate towards democratization or strategic moves such as the inter-movement work. All mentioned the 30 years of work of the LGBT movement in Mexico and global influences.

referred to by activists, as having an impact on present conversations on sexual citizenship. Paulina Martínez voices:

Cuando México intenta colocarse a nivel mundial... no sé porque trata de colocarse como país de avanzada cuando francamente tenemos tantos detalles. Nuestros gobernantes dicen que estamos, muy, muy, muy a la vanguardia...Entonces yo supongo que al tratar de siempre conservar esa imagen, firmando todo tipos de tratados y convenios internacionales, cuando ya llegó el tema de la diversidad sexual, no pudieron decir que no. Entonces, no hay muchos, pero si hay algunos, entonces como que se contrajeron esos compromisos y ya es un asunto más bien económico, como las presiones que están recibiendo en Europa [a nuevos miembros] para que se tomen todos esos asuntos y se coloquen a querer o no...No tanto porque estén muy convencidos o porque ellos quisieran.

When Mexico attempted to place itself on the international scene... I do not know why it tried to locate itself as an advanced country when frankly there are so many [unresolved] details. Our leaders say that we are at the avant-garde... So I suppose that by trying to keep this image, signing all these international treaties and agreements, when the theme of sexual diversity arrived they could not say no. There are not that many [agreements], but there are some. So since they signed these agreements, and it's more about the economy. It's like the pressure [new members] of the European Union receive, to take on these issues whether they want it or not... Not so much because they are convinced and they want to take them.

Similarly, activist Rosalinda Ávila makes a parallel with the ways in which gender mainstreaming was implemented in Mexico. She says:

Yo creo que todos esos factores de los organismos internacionales, pues tienen un peso enorme... Yo cuando hablo de la perspectiva de género digo que hay modas afortunadas. Y yo creo que tampoco los gobiernos hubieran implementado, ni en México, ni en Latinoamérica, ni en muchos lados [sin los acuerdos].

I believe that international organizations are a very important factor... When I speak of gender mainstreaming I say that there are fortunate fashions. I don't think that governments would have implemented it, in Mexico, nor in Latin America, nor in so many places [without these Conventions].

As these activists suggest, Mexico has signed or ratified a few instruments that specify “sexual orientation.” Across the Americas, regional mechanisms and initiatives developed through the Andean Community, Mercosur and Organization of American States (OAS) make mention of sexual orientation.<sup>17</sup> These changes have taken place in a very recent past. Since 2008 the OAS, for example, has passed three resolutions on “Human Rights, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity” that “condemn acts of violence and violations of human rights in reaction to sexual orientation and gender identity. It also urges the States to investigate these cases and to assure that the violators are brought to justice” (De Cicco, 2010). At the UN, a resolution on human rights violations based on sexual orientation and gender identity (L9/rev1) was presented by South Africa along with Brazil in 2011. The resolution was the first to bring focus on sexual orientation at the UN. The resolution highlights the universality of human rights and requested the High Commissioner of Human rights to prepare a report on violence and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, in a climate where the government is led by the most conservative factions of a right-wing party, Mexico was one of the 23 States that supported the resolution. Mexico had also supported a previous Dutch-French initiative on sexual orientation and gender identity in 2008 that remains open for signatures at the UN.

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<sup>17</sup> The Organization of American States passed three resolutions on human rights, sexual orientation and gender identity in 2008, 2009 and 2010. (See AG/RES. 2435 (XXXVIII-O/08), AG /RES 2504 (XXXIX - 0/09) and AG/RES. 2600 (XL-O/10).

<sup>18</sup> Other international agreements making mention of “sexual orientation” include CEDAW and the Yogyakarta Principles. In October 2010, at the UN, the CEDAW committee adopted “general Recommendation No. 28 which finally includes, after more than six years of work, “sexual orientation and gender identity” (De Cicco, 2010). Mexico has ratified CEDAW since the 1980s. In 2006, a group of experts in human rights met in Indonesia to elaborate the Yogyakarta Principles. The document outlines a set of international principles relating to sexual orientation and gender identity based on legal international standards with which all States must comply.

As Paulina and Rosalinda suggest above, in the era of multiculturalism, the Mexican State has been supportive of the various resolutions, conventions and other documents that have highly influenced local politics in their perspectives. It is not clear, however, that this support has clearly been made for LGBT rights themselves. Such reasoning might not be exclusive to sexual rights, as “normative pressure and imitation have been important factors shaping states’ decisions to ratify international human rights treaties” (Wotipka and Tsutsui, 2008: 724).

While across borders and to other states, Mexico has asserted its will to defend human rights in what regards sexual orientation, at times at a domestic level the Federal government has maintained an ambiguous posture towards LGBT rights. This has been notable in some incidents such as the one related to the National Day Against Homophobia (May 17). The day was unanimously approved at the legislative assembly. However, the federal executive changed the wording and called it the: “Day of Tolerance and Respect of Preferences,” which irritated LGBT activists (Norandi, 2010). Similarly, shortly after the reform to the civil code in the Federal District, which permits same-sex marriage, The Office of the Mexican Attorney General (Procuraduría General de la República, PGR) questioned the constitutionality of the reform, requesting that the law be reviewed by the Supreme Court. As the hearings were approaching, the president made it clear that he viewed the law as unconstitutional. During a presidential visit to Japan, he declared that he respected same-sex marriage, but “that the Constitution explicitly speaks of marriage between a man and a woman” (Herrera Beltrán, 2010).

In the era of multiculturalism, the Mexican State affirms the existence of difference, beyond the *mestizo* rhetoric. This includes plurality in terms of various practices and identities, including sexual preferences. As some testimonies suggest, these changes took place in a particular historical horizon where the unintended consequences of 1994 events, which reverberated in many areas of Mexican life. This also became clear in the production process of laws, where identity categories that appear as separate in Mexican and international laws affect one another. Multiculturalism produces the image of 'separate' reproductive sexuality. The production of the term "preference" in the Constitution until 2011, when it was changed to "sexual preference," suggested an ambiguous relationship to same-sex sexuality in the nation. This ambiguity was also apparent in the debates around the same-sex marriage controversy that led the law to be reviewed at the Supreme Court of Justice. I examine this case in the next section.

### **The Reproduction of the Nation**

In her article "Patriotic thoughts or intuition: roles of women in Mexican nationalisms," Natividad Gutiérrez Chong (2006) illustrates how women have been perceived as the biological reproducers of the Mexican nation since colonial times, in the era of independence nationalism. Based on Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias (1989) analysis on the five roles of women in nationalism, Gutiérrez Chong remarks that in the three types of nationalism, women have remained in the role of the biological reproducer of the nation. At the Mexico City 4th lesbian march in 2010, the 400 participants walked down the streets of the historical center of the city. The parade departed from the central plaza of the Hemiciclo a Juárez and to my surprise ended at the Monument for Mothers

(Monumento a la madre). I learned later that the itinerary had not been chosen by the organizing committee. Rather the organizers, who were new to the logistics of the event, had sent their request to use the streets to the City and had been provided this itinerary. I wondered if concluding the parade at the Monument for Mothers was a simple coincidence, an ironic joke or a disciplining call, from some bureaucrat who determined the route of the march. This came to mind not because lesbians cannot be mothers, but because in symbolic terms, the terms lesbians and mothers have been perceived as opposites. As Wittig (1981: 20) suggested a few decades ago, a lesbian is not a woman, since she is not “made” through a social relation with a man, “a relation which implies personal and physical obligation as well as economic obligation,” including biological reproduction and childcare. This is not to say that lesbian identified women are never mothers, in empirical terms many lesbians are of course mothers. Sara Espinosa Islas (2007) work focuses on the lesbian mother’s group Grumale that was created in Mexico City in 1986. Four of the women who participated in my research were mothers at the moment of the interview. While in concrete terms, many queer identified individuals have ventured into the life of parenthood, one of the central conversations in the public sphere in 2009-2010 was related to the role of queers in the [biological] reproduction of the nation. The conversation was brought by the official debate on same-sex marriage that culminated at Mexico’s Supreme Court of Justice in August 2010.

In this section, I examine the sessions of August 3 and 5, 2010, when the constitutionality of same-sex marriage was discussed at the Supreme Court. The hearings represent the moment when a legal reform that took place in the Federal District, came under the scrutiny of the nation through judicial power. The events were simultaneously

discussed in the press, the media and in everyday conversations. In the discussion where eleven magistrates participated, the Court largely focused on the relationship between marriage and the family. I suggest here that the Court did not only grapple with the constitutionality of the re-definition of marriage, but the polyvocal dialogue threaded a narrative that questioned if Mexican society was going to be contaminated not only by queer non-procreative sexuality, but by queer reproduction. I link the discussion with other debates on reproduction arising at the moment in Mexico. I use the transcription of the sessions that Mexico's Supreme Court has made available on-line, in addition to some ethnographic data collected at the hearings on August 5<sup>th</sup> and additional secondary sources.

#### *From the Reform to the Constitutional Hearings*

On December 29, 2009 the Federal District officially published the Reform to the Civil Code in the Federal District. As across the continent, the issue of same-sex marriage had been at the forefront of the agenda of an important number of LGB(T) activists in this past decade (see Pierceson, Piatti-Crocker and Schulenberg, 2010). The path to the 2009-2010 events had in fact been opened since 2001, when a motion to pass a cohabitation law (*Sociedades de Convivencia*), which included same-sex couples, began. After many years of struggle of over 300 organizations, public intellectuals and formal representatives, *Sociedades de Convivencia* was approved in 2006. In 2007, civil unions (*Pacto Civil de Solidaridad*) were approved as well in the State of Coahuila by the local congress. As the State is dominated by one party, the PRI, the law required far less struggle than in Mexico City and was passed within two months in Coahuila (Lozano, 2010). In the Federal District, the bill to reform Article 146 had been introduced by the

PRD, a leftist party in Mexico.<sup>19</sup> The reform had also been promoted by 52 civil society organizations (Notiese, 2011). Marriage was redefined as “the free union between two people to realize a living community, where they share respect, equality and support each other...”<sup>20</sup> Previously, the law specified that marriage was the union between “a man and a woman.” At a seminar on lesbian theory in which I took part at the National University (UNAM), activist Nadia Rosso shared in class that gender-specific language had been removed from the law and official forms related to Article 146. “The law has been queered for all,” she suggested.

Article 391 that focuses on adoption was not modified. The article says that married couples or common law partners can adopt a child. Shortly after the reform was approved, The Office of the Mexican Attorney General (PGR) suggested that Articles 146 and 391 of the Federal District Code were unconstitutional. In its announcement to the press, the PGR voiced that the reform challenged children’s interests. They suggested that all minors have the right to “the ideal” family as established by the permanent constituting power in 1974. This family model had been established in relation to population policies that promoted a small family composed of a father, a mother and a few children. The PGR also considered that the Reform challenged Articles, 4, 14, 16 and 133 of the Mexican Constitution (PGR, 2010).<sup>21</sup> The constitutionality of Article 146 and Article 391 was analyzed by eleven judges at the Supreme Court over various

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<sup>19</sup> While the PRD is a leftist party, it did not promote *Sociedades de Convivencia* for six years (See Lozano, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> My translation. “Matrimonio es la unión de dos personas para realizar la comunidad de vida, en donde ambos se procuran respeto, igualdad y ayuda mutua...”

<sup>21</sup> As previously mentioned Article 4, discusses the right to a family and its corresponding protection. The PGR questioned through Article 14 and 16, if the Federal District had the faculties to modify marriage. Article 133 suggests that the Constitution is valid in all Mexican States.

plenary sessions that took place on August 3, 5, 9, 10, 12 and 16, 2010. Based on the sessions of August 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, the Court established the constitutionality of the reform on marriage in the Federal District.<sup>22</sup>

### *Familial roots*

On August 5<sup>th</sup> 2010, I attended the hearings at Mexico's Supreme Court. While I was present on the day marriage was the focus and not adoption, I first found curious that most of the conversation was permeated by the notion of the family. While same-sex marriage has been on the agenda of various groups of LGBT activists around the world, the debates surrounding the issue have varied in different countries. In a comparative study between France and the United States at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, French sociologist Eric Fassin (2001) highlights how in France the debate largely moved around the notion of a structuralist "social order," while in the USA ideas of a sexual counterculture and marriage as a form of normalization were central in public discussions. In Mexico, several of the discussions around *Sociedades de Convivencia* and later same-sex marriage reflected in relation to some of the notions that dominated debates elsewhere, particularly in Europe. Mexican feminist scholar Martha Lamas (2005), for example offered an analysis on the debates in Spain and France, in order to think through the Mexican case of *Sociedades de Convivencia* that had not been passed at the moment. While these reflections were useful, the Mexican case has its own particularities. If in France the buzzword had been "social order," in Mexico in 2010 it was *la familia* (the family). Other words floated in the air such as human rights, marriage

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<sup>22</sup> On August 10, 2010 the Court affirmed that Federal District marriage contracts were valid in all Mexican States. Nonetheless, each State could determine their definition of marriage. On August 16, the Supreme Court announced that adoption by same-sex couples was constitutional, which concluded the case.

as patriarchal or divine, but the Constitutional hearings emphasized with no doubt the question of marriage in relation to the family.

This was in part a consequence of the arguments that pushed the hearings to the Supreme Court. While the Office of the Mexican Attorney General (PGR) suggested same-sex marriage posed a challenge to Articles 4, 14, 16 and 133, Article 4 had an important weight in the discussions at the Court, and perhaps even more in the popular imaginary. Article 4 stipulates that “Men and women are equal under the law, which will protect the organization and development of the family...”<sup>23</sup> In addition, the Court had to determine if the modifications of Article 146 of the civil code had a legal impact on Article 391, consequently linking marriage and adoption. However, it was far from being the first time that same-sex marriage, or unions, were posed as a threat to the *Familia Mexicana*. As early as 2000, activists recalled how political parties who were not sympathetic to *Sociedades de Convivencia* thought the initiative was a “ridicule assault to moral values and a direct threat to the Mexican family” (Lozano, 2010: 139). In addition, right-wing lay groups and the Catholic Church have been strong advocates of this same discourse. Same-sex marriage was, however, seen as one of the many threats to the “Mexican family.” For example, the archbishop of Guadalajara, Juan Sandoval Iñiguez, suggested that today in Mexico various “perversions” prevent young people from forming families, including “divorce, abortion, open relationships, same-sex marriage and adoption by same-sex couples” (Notimex a, 2010).

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<sup>23</sup> My translation. “El varón y la mujer son iguales ante la ley, esta protegerá la organización y el desarrollo de la familia.”

As the PGR had pushed the debate in the well-known direction of the threat to the family, many citizens of all positions articulated their voices along those lines. When I came out of the subway station to attend the hearings at the Supreme Court on August 5<sup>th</sup>, there was a group distributing flyers to passengers from the *Instituto Mexicano de Orientación Sexual* (The Mexican Institute of Sexual Orientation). The conservative group held a banner towards the street that said “Children in the Federal District have the right to a father and a mother.” A few feet away, another group stood up holding a poster that said *Grupo de padres por la diversidad/ Condesa, México* (Parents’ group for diversity). A mother who was part of this group had a banner across her body that said “I love my gay son.” After the audience a group of activists chanted slogans, such as “There is no political freedom, if there is no sexual freedom” and “Love in the family defeats homophobia.” For the public standing near the Court on this day, it was clear that the symbolic struggle was played at the level of the family. At the court marriage and the family were not only thought in terms of protecting individual rights, but rather the protection of the institutional guarantee called “the family.” At the heart of the debate was the question: Does same-sex marriage produce a family?

### *Queer reproductions*

While marriage is not mentioned in the Mexican Constitution, the term “family” is, since 1974. For part of the Court, the family was constituted by a man, a woman and a few children, as described in 1974 when the National Population Council (CONAPO) was founded. This information is not textually inscribed in the Constitution. It was rather part of the discussions at the Federal Legislative Assembly that led to the creation of

CONAPO. During the hearings, Judge Anguirre Anguiano also considered that the Laws of Reform of 1859 had in mind the same kind of family. Juárez' Laws of Reform made marriage a civil contract, instead of a religious union, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Judge Anguirre Anguiano and the President of the Court Judge Ortiz Mayagoitia both suggested that the goal of marriage was reproduction. This is not a new trend as Anguirre Anguiano (SCJN, 2010: 27) voiced:

El matrimonio en Grecia y en Roma antiguas era obligatorio, y su fin no era el placer ni la unión de dos seres que se correspondían sentimentalmente, sino para unir a dos seres en un mismo culto doméstico para hacer nacer a un tercero que fuera apto para continuar este culto, y por ello, era fácil disolver el matrimonio si la mujer era estéril. En las leyes de Manú y en la India, la mujer estéril se remplazaba al cabo de ocho años.

Marriage in Greece and in Rome was obligatory, and its goal was not pleasure nor the union of two people who had feelings for one another, it was to unite two beings in the cult of domesticity to give birth to a third one who would continue this cult, for this reason, it was easy to dissolve marriage if the woman was sterile. In the laws of Manú and in India, sterile women were replaced after eight years.

Anguirre Anguiano searched for the roots of marriage and the family in Greece, Rome and India; in vaguely specified times far before the 2010 Mexican Constitution. By pointing out in this direction, the Judge attempts to locate marriage as an institution that has its roots at the epicenter of Western civilization (or perhaps Indo-European), in worlds perceived to have played a role in the constitution of present social dynamics.

In his interpretation of marriage, Anguirre Anguiano presents women as disposable objects with the obligation of reproducing bodies. Women are, nonetheless, rarely mentioned further at the Court hearings as the couple and the family is kept most

of the time at the center of the debate. It is therefore difficult to speak of “lesbians” or “gay men” as distinct categories in the context of the debates. When “woman” is spelled in the text, it is rarely without its “natural” pair: “man.” The so-called heterosexual couple becomes the mean per excellence to reproduce. As Judge Anguirre Anguiano says:

las parejas heterosexuales no son iguales a las que se constituyen por personas del mismo sexo... y no son iguales por una razón biológica, las parejas heterosexuales pueden reproducirse, pueden procrear hijos, creo que esta es la preocupación esencial de la institución del matrimonio.

heterosexual couples are not the same as the ones constituted by the same-sex... and they are not the same because of a biological reason, heterosexual couples can reproduce, they can procreate children. I think that this is the essential preoccupation of the institution of marriage (SCJNa, 2010: 47).

The focus is displaced from solely a particular kind of gendered body, to a form of social (or sexual) organization that requires a man and a woman. Reproductive biology depends on a system, constituted by a pair. The reproductive subject becomes the reproductive unit. This unit is not only differently gendered but also sexually oriented. Anguirre Anguiano has something further in mind than the mere ritual of procreation in a life time for the heterosexual couple when he frames his words and actions at the service of the future of human kind, as he asks: “*Puede haber algo más importante para un Estado que preservar la perpetuación de la especie?/Is there anything more important for the State than to preserve the continuity of a species?*” (SCJNa, 2010: 26). In the previous quote, the reproductive ritual is not only product of an animalistic evolution, but socially legitimated through “the institution of marriage.” Pushed to an extreme the “distortion” of the figure of marriage as known until recently has the potential to endanger the

species. The potential of every sperm and ovule must be preserved so we may populate earth. Reproduction must however not be excessive. As in different parts of the world, the idea of limiting the size of families developed in Mexico through population policies. Thesis such as Elrich's *The Population Bomb* (1968) that suggested overpopulation was occurring in the Global South, gained popularity throughout the 1970s. These global discourses were heavily "interwoven through the projects of colonialism, development and nation building" (Gosine, 2010: 150). The production of the "ideal family" is carefully intertwined with the forces of the time. Anguirre Anguiano (SCJN, 2010: 34) recognizes that same-sex couples might have access to reproductive technologies and adoption:

No desconozco que parejas del mismo sexo pretendan eliminar la imposibilidad biológica en que se encuentran para poder concebir, recurriendo a otros medios diversos de la reproducción natural como puede ser la inseminación artificial y la adopción, pero ello no las equipara a las parejas heterosexuales que naturalmente pueden convertirse en padre y madre y que libremente deciden constituir una familia que garantice la protección de sus miembros.

I know that same-sex couples can eliminate the biological impossibility of giving birth, taking advantage of various means other than natural reproduction, as artificial insemination and adoption. But that does not make them the same than heterosexual couples who can naturally become fathers and mothers, who decide to constitute a family freely that can guarantee the protection of its members.

As this quote reinforces, the presence of a new body does not constitute the ultimate proof of the capacity to reproduce. Rather, heterosexual marriage becomes the ultimate proof to judge on this ability. The queer subject has been described in the US context as being at odds with narratives of birth-marriage-reproduction-child-rearing- retirement-death (Halberstam, 2005). As Edelman (2004) has put it, the queer subject represents no

future. If Anguirre Anguiano knows that queer couples have access to reproductive technologies, the heart of the anxiety in the debates is not only foreclosing the future. In the end, there is faith that some boys and girls will get to work and reproduce the humankind. But what if the queer boys and girls decide to reproduce as well? What if their unions might become intelligible through an already existing institution, namely the family? By being acknowledged by the State, the metanarrative of the family risks being twisted, and the future of the family, society, and why not the species, risks becoming unpredictable. The subject that puts in danger the traditional logic of reproduction is called to order.

This was also true, at the time of the hearings, for women who were incarcerated for aborting. Since 2007, life is protected since the moment of inception in 18 Mexican States. In some States, women might even be subjected to 30 years of prison, as abortion is considered to be a homicide. In the State of Coahuila where same-sex unions have been legalized, women may be incarcerated for aborting. Originally, the civil union bill said that only citizens who were free of HIV/AIDS were allowed to contract a “civil union.” The subject of premature death could not enter the confines of an institution labeled in this move as reproductive to sustain future generations. Through the efforts of LGBT activists in the State of Coahuila, this measure was changed right before the law passed (Lozano, 2010). Citizens must still take an HIV/AIDS test, but they can now contract a civil union regardless of their status. As the virgin brides of past centuries had to let some drops of blood color the sheets, the presumably queer subject of the “civil union” must let blood fill the test tube to ensure the future. Whether on the bed, in the lab or on the

ground of militarized drug war zones of Northern Mexico, blood stands as the promise for a future. The policing of reproduction takes various forms, whether on the ground of women bodies or the act of civil unions or marriage.

In when “Marriage Falls,” anthropologist Tom Boellstorf remarks about the US case that the “time of the conservative often takes the form of a future created by moving the past into the present” (2007: 230). “Conservative” members of the Court certainly exemplified this type of vision for the future, suggesting that marriage and the family were ancestral institutions that could not be changed. Instead, other judges voiced a vision anchored in the idea of a present that had recently changed and required a legal reform. As Judge Silva Mesa (SCJN, 2010: 52) suggested:

No podemos dejar de advertir... que la realidad social de nuestro país y en concreto la del Distrito Federal, es totalmente distinta a la de hace algunos años, de ahí que sea tarea del legislador ir midiendo esa evolución.

We cannot lose sight... that the social reality of our country, and in particular of the Federal District, is completely different than the one of a few years ago. Legislators must do the labor of measuring this evolution.

In this sense, many judges discredited the idea that marriage and the family were immutable categories. Judge González Sala suggested that traditionally marriage has been recognized between a man and a woman. However, he asked: “*¿Necesariamente tiene que ser ese concepto el que permanezca invariable? ¿cuál es la esencia? ¿Cuál es el elemento esencial, hombre-mujer o dos personas?/* Is this necessarily the concept that needs to remain unchanged? ...what is the essence? What is the essential element, man-woman or two people?”(SCJN, 2010: 74-75). González Sala questions here the boundaries of marriage on what may change versus what is immutable in the legal text,

and perhaps even in cultural understanding. Marriage here is still understood as a contract between two people. Throughout the hearings, Gonzáles Sala and other members of the court did not characterize marriage further than in relation to the number of people involved in the contract, the gender and sexual orientation of individuals, the procreative possibilities of marriage and its relation to the family. González Sala, as other judges in favor of the Reform, suggests that marriage and procreation are not necessarily tied, as he responded to some of his colleagues:

Con todo respeto...la procreación no es parte de un elemento esencial del matrimonio, tampoco atenta contra la protección que la Constitución otorga a la familia y a la procreación, porque aquellos que quieran concebir están en plena libertad de hacerlo.

With all due respect... it has been a long time that procreation is not an essential part of marriage anymore. This is not against the protection that the Constitution grants to the family and to procreation because those who want to conceive are free to do so (SCJN a, 2010: 52).

Disentangling marriage from procreation implies that the family is not perceived to have its source in marriage. In fact, many of the judges clearly state that in a social or constitutional sense, they do not perceive marriage and the family to be directly related and that some families do not have their origin in marriage. However, they do not go as far as suggesting that “families we choose” (Weston, 1997) are protected by the Mexican Constitution. Kinship tends to be imagined in terms of a set of ties traditionally reserved to consanguine families. Judge Zaldívar Lelo de Larrea (SCJN, 2010: 39) describes his interpretation of “the family” in a “plural and modern Mexico” (SCJN, 2010: 41). He says:

La familia hoy en un mundo moderno no es un concepto unívoco, no hay un concepto ideal de familia, hay muchos conceptos de familia, hay familias que se forman por una madre soltera, hay familias de matrimonios que se divorcian y después a su vez forman otras familias, hay familias en donde los niños son educados por la abuelita, por los abuelos y hay familias por supuesto, incluso antes de esa reforma en donde parejas de un mismo sexo tienen hijos ya sea adoptados o ya sea hijos biológicos que educan, que cuidan y no veo ninguna razón para sostener que sólo hay un concepto ideal de familia...

In a modern world, the family is not a concept that has only one meaning. There is no ideal concept of the family. There are many concepts of the family. There are families that are formed by single mothers, there are families of couples who divorce and then form other families. There are families where children are educated by grand-mothers, grandfathers and there are families where of course, before this reform same-sex partners had children whether they were adopted, or raised and taken care of biological children. And I do not see any reason to sustain that there is only one concept of the family (SCJN, 2010: 39).

In his opinion, the reform did not challenge the Constitution, because the term family might have many meanings. While Zaldívar Lelo de Larrea suggests that there might be various types of family, it is important to notice that all examples provided include children and one or more adults. Reproduction remains an important preoccupation in this plurality of families. Judge Gudiño Pelayo changes the focus to the couple on the next day of the hearings as he states that there are many ways of constituting a family, which might include those who live “*los que viven en matrimonio...en unión libre... en concubinato, los hijos que viven únicamente con uno de sus padres... con sus abuelos .../as a married couple... in common law unions...as concubines, children who live with one parents...with their grandparents...*” (SCJNa, 2010: 54). For Zaldívar Lelo de Larrea and other members of the Court, same-sex partners might give place to an institution called the family. For Anguirre Anguiano and the President of the Court, same-sex

reproduction will engender a collectivity that remains at the margins of intelligibility that does not deserve any form of State recognition.

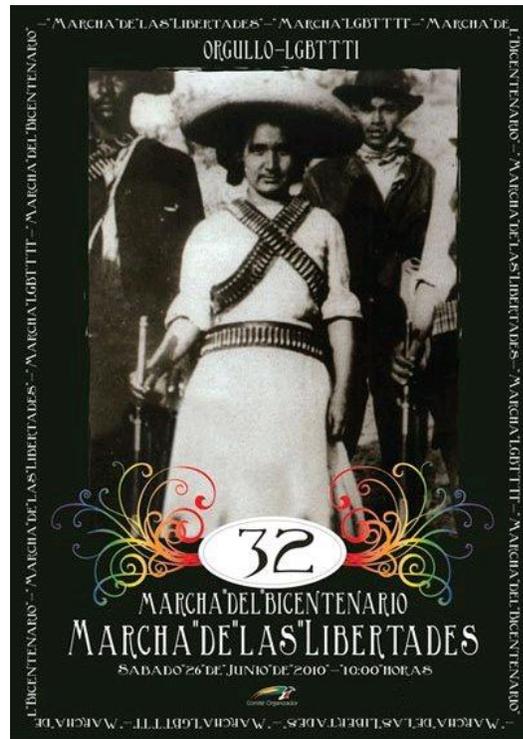
In the end the Court recognized the Constitutionality of the Reform of Article 146 in the Federal District and put into doubt the connection between Article 4 on the family and marriage. The hearings nonetheless illustrate the ways in which the policing of reproduction remains a central preoccupation. Interestingly, the hearings craft same-sex marriage as potentially reproductive of biological bodies, and of this institution called the Mexican family.

### **The Reinvention of the Bicentennial**

It was at the San Lázaro Legislative Palace, the headquarters of the Congress of Mexico, when I first saw the poster of the 32<sup>nd</sup> LGBTTTI March of Mexico City. After walking through a neighborhood of rundown buildings, old cars and street dogs in *colonia* el Parque, I arrived to the gates of the legislative palace. To get in, I had to empty my pockets, go through a metal detector, leave my ID and inform security that I was going to the *Forum for the Human Rights of Lesbians in Mexico*.<sup>24</sup> At the end of this rather unusual day at the Legislative Palace where deputies, ambassadors, performance actresses and scholars were invited to speak of the human rights of lesbians in Mexico, the poster of the 32<sup>nd</sup> LGBTTTI March of Mexico City was presented.

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<sup>24</sup> In Spanish: Foro por los Derechos Humanos de las Lesbianas en México. The Forum was organized by the Committee of the Center of Studies for the Advancement of Women and gender Equity (CEAMEG) at the Legislative Assembly (Comité del Centro de Estudios para el Adelanto de las Mujeres y la Equidad de Género (CEAMEG) en la Cámara de Diputados). Program available at: [www3.diputados.gob.mx/camara/content/download/.../foro\\_lesbianas.pdf](http://www3.diputados.gob.mx/camara/content/download/.../foro_lesbianas.pdf) (Accessed 01/24/2011)



A feminine revolutionary figure stands at the center in a black and white picture. This picture is inscribed within the tradition of the 1910 *soldaderas*, soldier women who were fighting the revolution. Female revolutionary figures, commonly named *Adelitas*, have been represented as romantic beautiful women in cultural productions such as in the musical tradition of *corridos*. At the same time, or in other cultural productions, they are seen as brave soldiers who would die for the revolution (Arrizón, 1998). In the poster above, the *soldadera* defiantly looks at the observer with an assertive gaze. The white dress marks her as a female, while her facial traits are not convincingly feminine. Under her skirt, curly vines of the color of the rainbow vivify the picture. At the bottom of the

image we read “32,” indicating that this was the 32<sup>nd</sup> march of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Travesti and Intersex (LGBTTTI) community.

Across the Americas, States have declared the celebration of bicentennials. In Mexico the bicentennial celebration included many activities carried out by the government in 2010. In the official Report<sup>25</sup> of the bicentennial, activities were catalogued under four categories. These included the dissemination of historical knowledge, exhibits, public celebrations and artistic productions. The amount of time, activities and money spent on the bicentennial is gargantuan. Only in the category “dissemination,” 27 activities were conducted. These included the publication of history books and audio books, the broadcasting of 127 TV shows, the translation of the Mexican Constitution and the national anthem in 13 indigenous languages, awards for best dissertation on Mexican history, the creation of a Web Site, etc. The Mexican State took pleasure in conducting massive actions during one of the worst unemployment crisis in the country. The Secretariat of Public Education, which was in charge of the celebration, estimated that expenses summed up to 700 million pesos, which approximates 50 million US dollars (Sánchez, 2010). On Independence Day a grandiose celebration was planned. Historian José Manuel Villalpando, who managed the festivities, announced that the cost of Independence Day celebrations will remain confidential until 2022, for reasons of national security (Notimex, 2010).

On its official Webpage, it is specified that the bicentennial is a celebration that intends to bring the nation beyond commemoration. It suggests that it wants to “renew

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.bicentenario.gob.mx/PDF/ReporteActividadesBicentenario2010.pdf>

the values and ideals that sustained the nation” and give a sense to the present through a resignification of history. Interestingly, it suggests that it is not a history that excludes. The organizing committee wants to open a reflection and all Mexicans those who live within Mexico and outside of Mexico “have the right to interpret it freely.”<sup>26</sup> While many activities permitted a dialogue, the State published 27 million copies of the book *Viaje por la historia de México* (2010) (Travel through Mexico’s History) by Luis González y González. The Mexican postal service had the mission to deliver the book to every single Mexican household. Needless, to say, some versions, events and figures were privileged over others in the book and in other activities.

In Mexico City, it would have been difficult to miss that the bicentennial was celebrated. I remember hearing many advertisements on the radio. Every single time I went to the theatre there was a clip promoting a sense of Mexican pride. On the streets, many buses were painted with the faces of Independence and Revolution heroes, as advertised by the government. During the entire year, the population was bombarded by the omnipresence of the bicentennial. If anthropology had once been the right arm of the Mexican State, this time history was the discipline at the service of the State.

On this occasion, various identity based movements were also holding alternative celebrations. While the State produces a dominant version of nationalism intertwined with a particular history, citizens, as agents, tend to reproduce, bend or transform this knowledge. As discussed in the introduction, the agent is, not thought of, here, as a being in a vacuum, but rather as an agent enmeshed within relations of power (Ortner, 2006).

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<sup>26</sup> [http://www.bicentenario.gob.mx/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=423&Itemid=70](http://www.bicentenario.gob.mx/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=423&Itemid=70)

The subject emerging from the process of subjectivation rises from a particular field of power, which at the same time provides the means by which s/he becomes an agent. In bicentennial mobilizations history is the terrain that the agent citizen bends. Since the 1970s social historians have challenged top-down social accounts about how the past was made and the realm of history is far from being only relegated to the ivory tower (Walkowitz and Knauer, 2009). Public historians of the bicentennial were well aware of that as they crafted the call for participation as a public open dialogue. However, some parallel manifestations making claims of an alternative history were not organized by the State, which is the case of the LGBT March of the bicentennial. While these official festivities promote a particular vision of history that greatly revolves around male heroes of the Independence and Revolution, they also offer a ground of public contestation where history may be re-told. State narrated national history is the condition, but also the possibility for redefining past and present subjects and collectivities.

Through the events of pride parade on June 28, 2010, “The bicentennial march,” I examine the ways in which the Organizing Committee and crowd participants mobilized history through the performance of historical figures and the pride parade speech delivered by committee. I suggest that by mobilizing historical figures recognized by “official” history, participants engaged in a modernist narrative through which *mexicanidad* and active citizenship are reclaimed. At the same time, by queering some of these official figures or rescuing the story of past ostracized communities a queering of history is performed. Modernization and queering stand in tension as two strategies that

give place to a recognizable Mexican history, while twisting some of these figures and facts that provide a space to re-imagine the past, and thus illuminate a different present.

*Modernist Desires and Queer Atrocities*

On Saturday morning, I went to the 32nd Mexico City Pride parade. This was the fourth Pride parade I was attending in Mexico City since June 2000. As we approached the subway station *Insurgentes*, everything seemed to match what I recalled from past years. Many train travelers were carrying gay pride flags, or other rainbow colored gadgets such as hats, necklaces, belts and scarves. The ratio of young people increased in the wagon and groups of friends gathered in the subway that was becoming a bit more festive at every stop. These people were clearly not making it to work this morning. *Insurgentes*. Here we are. Right at the exit of the subway, street vendors approached the crowd walking into the *Glorieta de Insurgentes*, a giant circular public plaza. A boy, not older than 12, was selling rainbow flags. I walked passed him and left behind other vendors and evangelists who were shouting in a microphone something about *el pecado* (sin). We could barely advance in the narrow passage that connects the *Glorieta* with Genova Street in Zona Rosa. Approximately, 400, 000 people were present at the parade. Diana, a 40 year old interviewee, shared that when she began attending the pride march 10 years ago, she used to walk the parade back and forth from beginning to end. I remember having the same experience at my first march in Mexico City. This time, when I tried to witness the length of the whole parade on *Reforma* Avenue, it seemed impossible to do so as trucks, groups and multitudes kept departing from the Angel of Independence that functioned as the point of departure. As I approached the Angel there

were many *charros*, *Adelitas*, nuns, devils, angels, Aztec warriors, President Calderón in drag, and naked torsos in the crowd. But overall, individuals wearing jeans and T-shirts predominated, reversing the sacred order of what would make it to the media on the next day. As we arrived to the *Ángel de la Independencia*, a voice shouted: “*¡Qué Viva el Coronel Amalia Robles!*” And the crowd replied “*¡Viva!*” “*¡Qué viva Salvador Novo!*” and once again the crowd replied “*¡Viva!*” This was the end of the official speech of *La marcha* I caught in passing, while I was looking for my friends from the queer women group *Musas de Metal*. When I read later the official speech of the organizing committee on the Internet, I noticed that there were more names than the two I had written down in my notes, and to which the crowd replied enthusiastically, a point I come back later to.

The performance of the Bicentennial March embodies the desire to pertain to “official history,” to be acknowledged as a full participant in the making of the nation. In this sense there is nothing revolutionary or resistant in aligning oneself with the *independentistas* of 200 years ago. These are the men (and the women) who formed part of the movement for independence. From the very beginning of the speech pronounced at the parade, the Organizing Committee (OC) claims the independentists (See original speech in Appendix 3). The *Ángel* of Independence, the point of departure of pride parade for the past few years now, houses the bodies of national heroes that were exhumed, studied and examined as part of the bicentennial festivities. The stage where the OC pronounced its speech was resting on the monument of the *Ángel*, a few steps above the place where the remains of some celebrated, almost mythical, figures of the past are kept including Miguel Hidalgo, Ignacio Allende and José María Morelos. A few

months before, president Calderón had launched bicentennial celebrations at the exact same place, while electricians protested the liquidation of the Light and Power Company of Central Mexico that had led to the firing of 44, 000 workers. As President Calderón, the OC celebrated independentists, but this time the Ángel was surrounded by a carnivalesque crowd dissipating the energy of military bodies imprinted on this site a few weeks before. The soldiers sent north to shed blood on the everlasting drug wars, the queers took the streets, yet to participate in a march that has become sometimes as predictable as any military parade. It is in this site of memory that the OC pronounces:

Hace 200 años, en México y toda América, hubo quienes se plantearon que tenían derechos y sacaron de la clandestinidad y de la opresión esa dignidad para exigir igualdad para apropiarse de su territorio. Eso es también lo que nos convoca hoy aquí. Lo mismo que nos convocó desde hace 32 años...

200 years ago, in Mexico and all over Latin America, there were those who established they had rights. They lifted dignity out of secrecy and oppression and called for equality, to take over their territory. That is also what is bringing us here today. The same thing that brought us here 32 years ago...

In this initial statement, the Organizing Committee approaches independentists and the past 30 years of the LGBTTTTI movement through a language of rights. They propose that independence movements struggled for their rights, in a similar way than the LGBTTTTI movement has done so working to lift their “dignity out of secrecy and oppression” and calling for “equality.” Given the complex and violent history of colonialism the words “to take over their territory” are somewhat more delicate to approach, but they probably have the effect of linking Mexicans from 200 years ago with contemporary Mexicans through a same territory. We, however, learn that these subjects are not only located in Mexico,

but across Latin America. In *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (1999), Carolyn Dinshaw proposes that by collapsing time through affective contact between marginalized people of the past and present, there exist the possibility to form communities across time. From the opening of its speech, the OC traverses the barrier of time to relate the present crowd with the independentists that were once dominated by the Spanish crown and the courageous men and women who braved the streets of Mexico City 32 years ago. Not only is the barrier of time traversed, but the OC goes beyond the nation by affiliating with independentists across Latin America. While this association with the “fathers” of the nation speaks of a modernist impulse, it is worth noting that the ways in which they seem to be presented is not as ever glorious, but rather as men who “established they had rights.” This presupposes a previous moment of uncertainty, where colonial powers established the rule. It opens the possibility of daydreaming of the fathers of the nation trapped, not in a coffin at the Ángel of independence (or in a laboratory at INAH), but once upon a time in the well-known modernist closet of “secrecy.” The OC draws an imagined transhistorical community united by their attempts to lift “secrecy and oppression” that includes among others the “fathers” of Latin America, the few homosexuals and lesbians who walked down the streets in 1978 and the 2010 March of the bicentennial participants.

Throughout the year, countries across Latin America were commemorating their separation from colonial powers, in the hope of founding sovereign countries. However, the committee acknowledges that the country has in its guts the roots of inequality since its foundation. As they say: “*Después de 200 años, sigue siendo un país profundamente*

*desigual, profundamente discriminatorio. Con una historia fundada en la exclusión, en el pensamiento único.../After 200 years, it continues to be a profoundly unequal and discriminatory country. With a history founded on exclusion, in a single kind of thought...*” The dichotomy between colonizer/colonized is left aside and the dynamics of exclusion are turned within. While the sorts of exclusions that exist in the country are not specified, the idea of “a single kind of thought,” brings us back to the monolith image of *mestizaje*, to a place where all bodies and ideas have the same shape and forms that remain unrecognizable through this kind “of thought.” In order to undo the myth of *mestizaje*, the participation of diverse historical actors must be recognized, the committee travels one hundred years of history to further suggest:

Hoy debemos decir que nosotras y nosotros también estuvimos en las luchas de Independencia, de la Reforma y en la Revolución Mexicana, porque este país no es solo un país de y para los heterosexuales, aquí convivimos muchas ciudadanías, somos diversos quienes habitamos la Nación.

Today we must say that we were part of the struggles for Independence, Reforms and of the Mexican Revolution, because this country is not only a country for heterosexuals. Many citizens live here together, we are diverse and we inhabit this Nation.

This paragraph summarizes the previous ideas. Claiming that they participated in the struggles that shaped the nation, LGBTTTI activists map themselves as Mexicans. In this quote hegemonic history is reproduced, but we here see a clear fissure when some of its participants are queered in the past as in the present. There exists a desire to inhabit the “official” history of textbooks and yet, the demand for a distinct interpretation is clear. Since the beginning of the 1980s, some queer groups have expressed their desires to form part of official State institutions and legitimize their existences and practices through the

eye of the State. We are far from the days of oppositional politics of the FHAR (Front of Homosexual Revolutionary Action) that was active in 1968. The OC is literate and skilled in the language of the State. It makes some of its demands along these lines, including the constitutionality of same-sex marriage and adoption by same-sex couples, the need for a lay State, and the demand to recognize the National Day against Homophobia. Yet, as most Mexicans, the OC suggests that the steps taken on the path to democraticization until now are rather shaky: “*El autoritarismo del garrote, debe abrirle paso a la institucionalidad democrática y el Estado de Derecho.../Authoritarianism must now leave place open to democratic institutionalism and the rule of law.*” However, these shaky steps are not entirely seen as irrelevant, because many of the demands made in the speech are crafted in the language of citizenship and law.

The compliance with official State narratives is also apparent in the exposure of certain historical figures, which are known as queer in *el ambiente*. Cultural studies critic Scott Bravmann (1997) has discussed the difficulties of locating the proper “queer historical subject” in part due to the intractability of identity and difference across time. It is rather complicated to know of the exact sexual and identitarian practices of the supposed queer subjects of the past. By reclaiming certain historical figures the gesture points a step further than simple acknowledgement. It calls for recognition of queer people within the nation today, through the efforts of individuals of the past. It asks for recognition of the contribution of the community, an imagined community that reaches across time. There is a sense that by taking out of the closet the figures of the past venerated by the Mexican State, the queer will be redeemed in this magic operation.

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz<sup>27</sup> is probably the best well-known figure that the OC attempts to push out of “the closet.” Sor Juana is in fact the only woman among the ten faces on the cover of the book *Viaje por la historia* (2010) that was sent to “all” Mexican households for the bicentennial celebration. She was a 17<sup>th</sup> century nun who is well known for her poems and her defense for women’s education. Sor Juana’s poems are mandatory reading throughout Mexican centralized formal education. Some of her love poems are said to have been crafted with the *Virreina* (colonial queen) in mind. Her desires for the *Virreina* are not explicit in the national curriculum, it is rather common knowledge in the circles of *el ambiente*. As I have discussed elsewhere (2007), Sor Juana’s name has been adopted many times by lesbian organizations, such as in the case of El Closét de Sor Juana. In general, she is depicted as an asexual 17<sup>th</sup> century nun, who was invested in education rather than in the promises offered by heterosexual marriage.

The organizing committee also pushes out of the closet the early 20<sup>th</sup> century painter Frida Kalho, who is labeled as bisexual in the speech. The figure of Frida Kalho has also often been used in lesbian and bisexual women’s groups’ iconography in Mexico City. The poet Salvador Novo, who held official government posts related to culture and was elected to the Mexican Language Academy, is also mentioned in the speech. Novo’s sexuality is a bit more known by the general public as he lived it openly in early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is also the case of recently deceased chronicler Carlos Monsiváis that the committee remembers. The painter Manuel Rodríguez Lozano who is a bit well less known than individuals previously mentioned was also mentioned by the committee.

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<sup>27</sup> On queer readings of Sor Juana see Arenal and Martínez-San Miguel (2005).

The trans revolutionary Coronel Amelio Robles and Antonio who was born as Catalina de Erauso and was recognized by the Vatican are named.

In addition to pointing towards known queer historical figures, the OC brings from the margins factual stories that stand at the periphery of Mexican traditional history. The OC reminds the crowd that there are millions of anonymous figures, such as the 13 men who were burned alive by the Holy Office of the Inquisition in 1658. A bit more recently, the famous 41 were arrested in 1901 at a ball where it is said that some men were dressed as women. The event became a scandal in the press. By invoking these stories, alternative routes for illuminating the past are proposed. Therefore, the OC produces an alternative public history. While Sor Juana, Novo and Kalho among others are remembered for their contributions acknowledged by the State at a point in time, the famous 41 and the victims of the Holy Office are remembered for their mistreatment by authorities. In tracing back those lines the OC points towards a community of injuries. Here, the OC embraces *los olvidados* (the forgotten ones) of “official” history. In the case of these anonymous figures, there is no direction in which they could be pushed “in the closet”; instead they are recalled as the sexual dissidents who were punished by authorities.

Among participants in the crowd who decided to perform historical characters for the occasion, it strikes me how the figure of the revolutionary *charro* or *Adelita* is predominant. While the OC names independentists, no character in the crowd embodies them. There are hundreds of Zapatas running down Reforma Avenue, pouring like a human river of revolutionaries. Some of them simply wear the sombrero, mustache and

*charro* clothes. Others have considerably taken pleasure in bending the traditional outfit. A man, presumably, dressed as an Adelita with a sombrero, a dress and holding a plastic rifle stands in front of photographers near the Ángel. On his dress, a figure of a muscular half-naked Zapata is painted. In the distance I see shirtless men dancing on a truck, a few feet ahead of me I see a shirtless Zapata imprinted on a dress. Very few of the revolutionary characters present at the march would be cast in a traditional play promoted by the official bicentennial. Zapatas have breasts or hold hands with boys. They are wearing a fluorescent mustache or singing too loud. There is something odd in the masculinity of Zapata and those who appear to be flawless are rendered suspicious by their location in the crowd. There are plenty of *charros* and Adelitas in books, TV shows, lectures and posters across the city, but few look like the one present in this sunny afternoon.

The OC's speech concludes with the appropriation of a performance taking place every Independence Day in Mexico. Every year on September 15 at 11pm, the President of Mexico rings the bell of the National Palace in Mexico City and repeats a contemporary adaptation of a patriotic cry that was first pronounced by the pro-independence priest Miguel Hidalgo, the *Grito de Dolores*. The *Grito* signaled the beginning of the War of independence. The speech of the bicentennial march concludes with an adaptation of the *Grito de Dolores*. The heroes that are remembered are not the traditional ones in this case. The cry is as follow:

¡Que viva El Coronel Amelio Robles!  
¡Que Viva Salvador Novo!  
¡Que Viva Juana de Asbaje!

¡Que Viva Manuel Rodríguez Lozano!  
 ¡Que Viva Cotita de la encarnación!  
 ¡Que vivan los cuarenta y uno!  
 ¡Que vivan los homosexuales que hicieron patria!  
 ¡Que vivan las lesbianas que han hecho esta nación!  
 ¡Que vivan las y los trans que han construido este país!  
 ¡Viva México!  
 ¡Viva Latinoamérica!

Long life to the Coronel Amelio Robles!  
 Long life to Salvador Novo!  
 Long life to Juana de Asbaje!  
 Long life to Manuel Rodríguez Lozano!  
 Long life to Cotita de la encarnación!  
 Long life to the 41s  
 Long life to the homosexuals who made this country!  
 Long life to lesbians who made this nation!  
 Long life to trans who built this country!  
 Long life to México!  
 Long life to Latin America!

In re-enacting the cry pronounced every September 15, the organizing committee appeals to a ritual very well known by Mexicans. By replacing the names of national heroes, by known figures (recognized as queer), the Organizing Committee displaces the ritual, connecting queerness with a historical act. The performance also troubles in some sense the choice of official names made as to know which historical actors are privileged over others, questioning the ways in which the nation remembers. After all, the list of names read by the president is also an adaptation. Hidalgo's words were stated in a sermon, and included the names of the Virgen de Guadalupe and Fernando VII. So the performance has traveled through time from a Church, to the National Palace (once inhabited by the president), and in what concerns us, to the 32<sup>nd</sup> LGBTTTI Pride Parade. I recall witnessing the *Grito de Dolores*, pronounced by government representatives in a small town in Veracruz and at the Mexican Embassy in Ottawa, Canada. It is a traveling

performance but generally at the hands of the State. Pronounced at Pride parade breaks with the pattern of its traditional speaker.

By inserting the names of queer figures in the *Grito de Dolores*, the OC converts these souls of the past into national heroes. The homosexuals, lesbians and trans of Mexico and Latin America are suddenly asserted in this public performance, as figures that worth remembering as builders of the nation. This *Grito de Dolores* simultaneously asserts and queers *mexicanidad*.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have discussed the production of non-normative sexualities in the shift from *mestizaje* to multiculturalism. While *mestizaje* pointed to one and only *mexicano*, multiculturalism gives the image of a mosaic community. I suggest that while multiculturalism primarily focused on ethnicity, social debates in the public sphere led to think of diversity in terms of various identitarian categories, including in terms of sexual orientation from the late 1990s onward. Public debates first focused on recognizing the existence of a discriminated homosexual subject, and since 2000 included the modes of intimacy that should be legitimated in Mexican society. These have largely been discussed through same-sex unions laws (*Sociedades de convivencia*) and the Reform on marriage, which was legitimated as constitutional at the Mexican Supreme Court. As discussed, these debates were largely centered on the nature of the Mexican family rather than on marriage itself. As the court was about to discuss if individuals of the same-sex

could form a Mexican family, the LGBTTTT community took part in the “Bicentennial March” during pride parade. Through the deployment of historical figures, participants affirmed their *Mexicanidad*, while queering formal Mexican history. This chapter provides an image of the historical horizon in which the subjectivities of women I interviewed were produced. It largely engaged with debates in the public sphere, to now focus in the following chapters on the ethnographic data that seeks to investigate how the social organization, discourses and practices of intimacy have shifted for women participating in queer communities in Mexico City since the 1960s.

**Chapter 4**  
**A Woman's World of Sexual and Gendered Possibilities:**  
**Subject Positions on Same-Sex Sexuality in Mexico City (1960-2010)**

In his work on masculinity and intimacy in the State of Sonora in Mexico, Nuñez Noriega (2007) questions if there exist other ways of understanding same-sex sexuality in Mexico than through the traditional anthropological frameworks. In other words, the author questions whether there are alternatives to the homosexual/heterosexual Western binary based on object/choice; or the Latin American model of activity/passivity centered on penetrative sexuality. As he underlines, the use of words to denominate individuals who engage in same-sex relations such as “gay,” “homosexual,” “joto,” etc. are not coincidental. They are ways of talking “that construct possibilities of intimacy in general and in particular intimacy between men” (2007: 53).<sup>28</sup> These words might evoke the dominant discourses on same-sex sexuality, or relate to local knowledges that make sense of same-sex sexual relations. During fieldwork, I also found that there were words used by women who participate in queer spaces in Mexico City, to signify the female subject who engages in same-sex sexuality. In this chapter, I discuss the subject positions that have been available to women to make sense of same-sex sexuality since the 1960s until today in Mexico. I grasp the possible gendered and sexual horizons of the subject through the narratives that were offered by the women I interviewed. Some of the subject positions such as *la lesbiana* are produced through the official legitimated discourses that circulate in the public sphere. Many more subject positions, however, such as *la*

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<sup>28</sup> My translation

*tortillera, la lencha* and *de ambiente* form part of the subjugated knowledge<sup>29</sup> produced in particular social networks. Alternative knowledge circulates in small towns, neighborhoods, queer networks of friendship or are part of the mass popular knowledge, subjugated knowledges that are “located low down the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity” (Foucault, 1980: 82). As Nuñez Noriega’s work demonstrates, while the labels “homosexual,” “heterosexual,” “joto,” etc. circulate in Mexico in multiple ways, desire, erotic encounters and interaction between bodies exceed language categories that form part of the sex-gender system. In this sense, there are moments in this chapter where subjects fit with difficulty into dominant subject positions or even with the subjugated knowledge produced in their networks of interaction.

Rather than exploring the production of discourses by diverse social actors, I am interested here in looking at the different subject positions that have emerged through time to make sense of women who practice same-sex sexuality in Mexico City. Here, I understand the subject as emerging through these particular subject positions, but always with the possibility of appropriating, bending, re-creating those through the process of cultural creativity. Subject positions allow seeing the self as constituted by multiple positions. As anthropologist Henrietta Moore suggests:

Within this theoretical framework a single subject cannot be equated with a single individual. Individuals are multiply constituted subjects and they take multiple subject positions within a range of discourses and social practices (2007: 41).

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<sup>29</sup> Michel Foucault refers to the notion of subjugated knowledges as a “whole set of knowledges that are either hidden behind more dominant knowledges but can be revealed by critique or have been explicitly disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity” (1980, 82).

An individual takes multiple subject positions at a given time. By discussing the subject positions through the narratives of women I interviewed, the relationship of interviewees to the subject positions inevitably emerges. In the case of some terms, women mentioned they circulated in their neighborhoods for example, but they did not identify with these. In other cases, women shared that they identified with some of these terms.

Most of the subject positions I explore in this chapter have rarely been explored as possibilities for women in Mexico City. In this sense, this chapter destabilizes the woman category in Mexico by looking at the intersection of gender and sexuality. In addition, it destabilizes the models through which same-sex sexuality has generally been discussed in Mexico. While a powerful critique of Euro-American categories took place principally in the 1990s through a closer look at practices of male same-sex sexuality (Taylor 1986, Prieur 1998, Carrier 1995); female same-sex sexuality has remained until today at the margin of these debates. Studies on women have focused on the category “lesbian,” without critical attention to other categories that circulate in Mexico City concerning female same-sex sexuality. I coincide with Nuñez Noriega in thinking that dominant sexual or gender identity categories will never be sufficient to reflect the complex “realities” of same-sex erotic and affective interaction. Nevertheless, it is difficult to embark on a project that would solely focus on how to think beyond categories, when these have not even been mapped in the case of female same-sex sexuality.

In the following pages, I first look at gendered subject positions: What it has meant to be a woman in Mexico since the 1960s, in the words of the women I

interviewed. I focus the remaining of the chapter on the subject positions that have made sense of same-sex sexuality for women, since the 1960s. More specifically, I look at *la tortillera*, *la lesbiana*, *la bisexual*, *de ambiente* and *la diversidad sexual*. While the labels of *la tortillera* and *de ambiente* displace Euro-American categories of sexual identity, I examine what is particular about the subject position *la lesbiana* in Mexico City, consequently troubling the myth of a universal lesbian category. I perform this task by examining how *la lesbiana* relates to traditional models of female sexuality in Mexico City, often thought of along the binary of double morality. I end the chapter with subjects who have ran away from any categorization, offering a powerful critique of rigid taxonomies that emerge through processes of subjectification.

### **Narratives of change in the lives of women**

Esa generación de mi mamá, ni siquiera tenían oportunidad de trabajar. Estaban sometidas a la casa, a tener hijos... Y no tenían ni opción de trabajar, ni de opinar, ni de decidir... era lo que el padre decía, lo que el marido decía y te sometías totalmente. Ya en mi generación trabajábamos, participábamos, pero aun así te tenían muy contenidas. Y ahora ya pienso que es un poquito menos. Ya ahora la mujer tiene más opción de trabajar, participar, tener ideas, competir. Aunque es difícil todavía, pero ya hay un poco mas apertura.

My mother's generation did not even have the opportunity to work. They were relegated to the house, to having children... They did not have the option to work, give their opinion or decide... it was what the father said. My generation worked, participated, but still we were restricted. And now I think it is a bit less. Now, women have more options to work, have their own ideas, to compete. Although it is still difficult but there is greater opening.

-Selva, interviewee

On a classic Mexico DF morning, I took the crowded subway to meet with Selva and her friend Bellota at a Vips café on *Calzada de Tlalpan*. When I arrived Selva, a 55 year-old teacher at the time, and Bellota 45 years old, were sitting at a table near the entrance sipping on coffee and nibbling on *pan dulce*. I met the pair the previous week at the lesbian group *Mujeres Mayores de 30*. From the beginning of the interview, Selva insisted on the point that gender norms have strongly changed in Mexico City in the past decade. Comparing her life with the one of her mother, Selva considered that her generation had enjoyed greater possibilities for participating in the wage labor economy and in the public sphere in general. However, she believed that younger generations had even more opportunities today. This narrative of progress was shared with me countless times by most interviewees, whether they were aged of 22 or 65 years old. The consistent rhetoric suggested that women's lives had greatly changed in Mexico in the past few decades. According to interviewees, changes related to a greater participation of women in the waged economy (and access to many more professions), greater opportunities to further their education, participation in non-traditional activities such as sports and greater opportunities for decision-making at home and in public life. The pressure for women to marry and focus their lives on a husband and children were also described as lesser now. In this section, I discuss the changes women perceived to have come into place for women in Mexico.<sup>30</sup> Based on the perspective of a few interviewees, I nonetheless question as well the limits of this narrative of progress.

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<sup>30</sup> I mainly focus on changes in women's lives in Mexico City. However, many interviewees grew up in surrounding areas such as El Estado de México or had parents that had come from other areas of the

*Labor and education*

Selva was born in 1955 at a time when Mexico was becoming increasingly urban. As she mentions earlier, women of her generation had more opportunities to participate in the wage economy. In 1930, 4% of women above 12 years old living in Mexico worked in the paid labor force, compared to 37% of women in 1998 (INEGI 2000). One of the important changes takes place during the economic crisis in the 1980s when many women began working for remuneration. Households develop survival strategies, among them, wives entering the workforce (Hubbell, 1993). In the following decade, the country remained in crisis. The economic collapse that took place in 1995 now stands as the worst among the many crises the country has suffered since the 1930s (Hiskey, 2005). In 2007 and 2008, food costs increased globally, and Mexico was particularly affected due to the decrease of consumer purchasing power (Torres Torres, 2010) and the subsequent US economic crisis. By 2010, in the Federal District 47.65% of women form part of the economically active population, in comparison to 41.06% of women for the whole country (INEGI, 2010b). The insertion of Mexican women in the labor force has been important for women as it impacts to various extents on their personal and economic autonomy. However, discrimination persists in working conditions in terms of salaries and opportunities (Hernández, Camarena and Castanedo, 2009).

Selva and Bellota discussed with me the limited opportunities in terms of choices of career they had been confronted to in their youth. Among interviewees of the two oldest generations (and in particular over 45), many had been trained as teachers, secretaries or

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country. This heritage influenced responses as I asked interviewees to compare their lives with the ones of their mothers, aunts and women of that generation.

nurses: professions that were thought to be acceptable for women at the time. Selva narrates how her family pressured her to become a teacher:

Pues en mi caso las expectativas que tenían mi madre y mis hermanas mayores, eran que sea pues una... maestra... muy mujercita, que me casara, tuviese hijo. Y desde ahí empezó mi conflicto, que porque me forzaron tanto a estudiar para profesora que lo hice. Sin defender mis derechos, sin defender mi decisión de ser química-bióloga que era lo que yo quería...

In my case, my mother and older sisters' expectations were for me to be... a teacher... very feminine, for me to get married and have children. And my conflicts started there, because they forced me so much to become a teacher that I did it. I did not defend my rights or my decision to be a biochemist, which is what I wanted...

While Selva “came out” to her family at a Christmas dinner when she was 25 years old challenging her family on her sexuality, she had been unable to assert her desire to study biochemistry. In the eyes of her family biochemistry was not an acceptable profession for women. In fact, less women attended higher education institutions at the time Selva wanted to study biochemistry in the 1970s. Since the 1960s there has been an important expansion of education in Latin America, to the point that there are no significant differences between male and female attendance to primary and secondary school, in countries such as Mexico (Parker and Pederzini, 2000). However, at the time Selva attended teacher's college, there were important differences between men and women in the ranks of higher education. In the 1960s, only 17.62% of students at the National University (UNAM) were women. By 2005, the UNAM published a report that 52% of their students were women (Córdoba Osnaya, 2005). Women have increasingly joined

the ranks of higher education. Even in the sciences, women constituted 47.8% of students by 2003 (Córdoba Osnaya, 2005).

Other women of Selva's age or older managed to convince their families to let them pursue non-traditional careers. Alicia, 65 years old, studied medicine in the 1960s when the profession was highly male dominated in Mexico. During the interview, Alicia recalled how her family kept her under surveillance, when she was already a professional. She described poignantly how she felt free for the first time when her family traveled with her to Acapulco, where she studied her residency. In this coastal city, she wore pants for the first time in her life and drank a glass of alcohol by the ocean. She was still visibly upset that families escorted her and the few other women who were moving to Acapulco. As she said "*Ya eramos profesionales, no eramos niñas/ We were already professionals then, not girls.*" In contrast to many women of her generation whom I interviewed, Martha (in her 50s) had not worked formally for most of her life. She formed part of the 60% of women who did not "officially" work, in Mexico. For most of her life, she had been a housewife, but had worked for a few years as a clerk. Later when she divorced her husband, her now adult children supported her, as she was studying alternative medicine. Martha owned an apartment in la Colonia Del Valle, a middle-class neighborhood in Mexico City. She had waited until her children left the house to divorce her husband and begin exploring her attraction to women in her late 40s.

Among the younger women I interviewed, families generally had the expectations that they would study and work. In fact, when I asked them if they felt that they had responded to the gender expectations of their family, some answered that their families were proud of their studies and of the careers they had undertaken. Yvonne, 38 years old, for example, mentioned that her father was proud that she was the only person in her family who had studied. As she explained, “*Solo tengo una carrera técnica en trabajo social, pero mis hermanos nunca terminaron la secundaria/* I might only have a technical career in social work, but my siblings never even completed secondary school.” Similarly, her partner Luisa, 31 years old, had grown up in a family where they encouraged them to be self-sufficient. During the interview, she recalled her father’s words about his expectation of her as a woman:

Cómo hombre [nos dijo] ustedes no deben esperar nada de nadie. Ningún hombre las debe de mantener. Deben de ser autosuficientes. Responsables y enseñarnos a trabajar. Muy diferente. Lo veía con mis primas, que ellas sí necesitaban como otras cosas. Nosotras éramos como las inútiles porque no sabíamos cocinar, no sabíamos planchar. No sabíamos hacer cosas de ese tipo.

As a man [he told us] you should not expect anything from anybody. No man should support you. You should be able to support yourself. Responsible. And he taught us to work. It was very different. I would see it with my cousins that they needed other things. We were like the ‘useless’ ones because we did not know how to cook or iron. We did not know how to do these kinds of things.

Luisa, who grew up in a working class neighborhood near Mexico City’s international airport, came from a family where her two sisters and herself were encouraged to strengthen the skills that would permit them to find work out of the home. In contrast to her female cousins, Luisa and her sisters were not asked to complete house work, a trend

that Luisa labels different from the norm. Luisa and her siblings were free of the *double jornada*, which their mother completed.

*La “Doble Jornada”*

While women of all ages had in general been expected to work out of their households, they had also been required to marry, have children and take care of a household as well. Many women, particularly the younger ones, had grown up with mothers taking part in *la doble jornada*--that is to say working out of the house and completing a second shift at home with domestic chores. Claudia’s mother was a woman that had been taking part in *la doble jornada* for most of her adult life. As we sipped on cappuccinos at a café near Claudia’s office to complete the interview, she explained that her mother married at age 17. At Claudia’s age (23 years old), her mother already had a son and worked with her husband at a small store in Iztacalco while being in charge of the household. Claudia did not want me to think that she belittled her mother’s domestic work, as she added that taking care of the house was “*un gran trabajo. Yo le reconozco a mi mamá, impresionante/a* a very big job. I recognize my mother’s efforts. Very impressive!” Claudia explained that as a daughter, she did not have to take care of the household as her mother did. During the day she worked long hours at an NGO, as a psychologist. However, like other women, she reported to have to take care of tasks that her brother did not have to do. Even Selene, 23 years old, who grew up in a family where gender norms were openly questioned said that “*inconscientemente todavía mi mamá me da tareas de mujer. Me pide que ponga la mesa y le pide a mi hermano que vaya a comprar algo a la tienda por ejemplo/* unconsciously my mother still assigns me to

women tasks. She asks me to put the table on. And she asks my brother to go buy something at the store for example”. She suggested, however, that her mother’s perspectives had influenced the kind of men and women they had become and recognized that her mother’s perspective challenged the norms of her community. As she says:

Ahora que lo veo, mis hermanos son un tipo de hombre muy distintos al tipo de hombres que he conocido a lo largo de mi vida. Lo veo con mi hermano que se caso. Y entonces el separa y lava la ropa de su mujer y de él, y cocina. Y entonces su mamá de su esposa, la regaña a ella y le dice que cómo permite que él lave o cocine. Y entonces para mi hermano es de lo más normal levantar un plato. Y todos se quedan asombrados

Now that I see it, my brothers are a kind of men very different from the type of men that I have known throughout my life. I see it with my brother who just got married. He washes his clothes and his wife’s clothes and he cooks. So his mother-in-law scolds his wife and asks how she even lets him wash and cook. So for my brother its the most normal thing to lift his plate [from the table] and they are all stunned.

Some middle-class women had workers at home that took care of most of the domestic work. While the employee does the work, women are generally seen as the ones that should provide the instructions. The *doble jornada* is lighter, but it then involves some management tasks. As far as I know, I did not interview any woman whom had an employee at all times at home, which implied that women still had to do many of the routine tasks.

#### *Gendered games, aesthetics and behaviors*

Wage labor, education and domestic work figured in the reported narratives of progress offered by the women I interviewed. Other women also spoke of how they had been expected to play certain games as girls and wear feminine clothes. Certain interviewees claimed that today the policing of these aesthetic and behaviors were less

omnipresent. Some women I interviewed shared that they had been tomboys in their childhood. Some of them had to this day a rather masculine appearance by Mexican standards. They kept their hair short, wore male clothes, etc. Elrolloes, 50 years old, described how her mother had had a problem with her masculine appearance throughout her childhood. She says: “*Y yo usaba jeans, y tenis, y jugaba football americano y me decía, con mucho coraje, con mucho dolor, con mucha frustración que esas no era actitudes que tenían las niñas*/I used to wear jeans, running shoes and play American football. She used to tell me with a lot of anger, pain and frustration that these were not girl behaviors.” Elrolloes challenged the expectations of her mother and community in terms of gender expression. Other women nearing their 50s spoke of how acting as tomboys was a greater challenge a few decades ago. Bellota, who grew up in the Estado de Mexico, says:

Imagínate hace 30 años. Yo ahora les envidio... ahora ya ves que hay equipos de fútbol y las mamás las meten. En mi pueblo eh... una vez que estaba de portera, un señor iba en una camioneta y se quedó, paró, para verme... por la situación. Era muy mal visto que una niña, estuviera jugando ahí. Fútbol, canicas... todo eso

Imagine 30 years ago. I'm jealous now, I would have liked that, now you see that there are soccer teams and mothers encouraging their daughters [to join teams]. In my town, once I was the goalie and a man was driving his truck. He stood there, stopped, to look at me.... It was not very well seen for girls, to play around there. Soccer, marbles...all of that.

By contrast, 23-year old Selene described playing with her brother's trucks, while he played with dolls. Her mother never had any problem with the fact that they did not play games that supposedly corresponded to their gender. However, Selene suggested that she considered her university educated parents to be an exception in the working class

communities she grew up in. She remembers her aunts questioning her mother on how she let her son play with dolls. Other women of Selene's age had a different experience. My friend Nadia, 24 years old, shared how her mother constantly asked her why she liked shaving her head. From time to time, Nadia asked her brother to cut her hair with clippers. During an afternoon we spent walking around the center of Coyoacán in search of the best chocolate, she recalled with a smile the time her older brother and her had played with the clippers to both end up with mohawks on their heads. The haircut was met with their mother's disapproval. But she also added that her mother often made the request for her to dress with more feminine clothes. Months later, when we met each other of Facebook chat and I told her that I was writing about this anecdote, she said that "aesthetics can be political." In that sense, Nadia was suggesting that she was consciously defying gender norms as a political statement, which was not necessarily always the case in other tomboy narratives. Female masculine aesthetics were in general disapproved by the families and communities of women of all ages I interviewed.

### *Questioning the teleology of progress*

Listening to the lives of women of very different ages, there is no doubt that many of the gender norms have changed in the past few decades. While I have no doubts that the possibilities women enjoy today are different than half a century ago, some of the interviews lead me to approach the narrative of progress with caution. When I asked the women I talked with if their lives considerably differed from the ones of their mothers, the difference was at times striking. In many other conversations, however, the narrative of progress was put into doubt. María Teresa, 44 years old, who sold clothes at a market

for a living, first suggested that women used to stay at home in the past. However, when I asked her to describe her mother's life, she recalled how her mother used to work very hard as a *comerciante* (tradeswoman) during Teresa's childhood. In various occasions, I was told in a general narrative that women lived under different conditions today, but listening to the particular family stories questioned at times this teleological narrative.

Claudia, 23 years old, was one of the few who suggested that the lives of women might not have changed that much from the past generation. Instead, she suggested that competing narratives predominated in contemporary Mexico, as we discussed:

A: Tú piensas que era diferente ser mujer en México una generación antes, si piensas en como en tu mamá, en tus tías...

C: Sí y no. Hay mujeres en México que siguen siendo, como por ejemplo, mi mamá, inclusive como mi abuelita. Pero habremos mujeres que estamos buscando un cambio, que estamos intentando hacer las cosas de manera distinta para nosotros y para otros. Siento que hay dos Méxicos en uno mismo. Te puedes ir a zona, por ejemplo Iztapalapa, puede haber una zona muy marginada donde hayan mujeres como se dice "muy luchonas." Y que ya están haciendo un cambio. Pero te puedes ir a una zona completamente distinta que inclusive sean clase media y estén como hace 30 años. No hay, no hay como un equilibrio en México, con las posibilidades, ni los accesos que tenemos las mujeres, en distintos espacios.

A: Do you think that it was different to be a woman in Mexico a generation ago, if you think about your mother, you aunts...

C: Yes and no. There are women in Mexico who are still like... my mother, or like my grandmother. But there are women [including myself] who are looking for a change, whom are trying to do things in a different way for ourselves and others. I feel like there are two Mexicos in one. You can go to a neighborhood, for example Iztapalapa...in a very marginal part of the city where there are women who are very *luchonas* (hard-working). They are making changes. But you can go to a very different area, perhaps even a middle class one and they are like 30 years ago. There is no balance in Mexico, in terms of possibilities or access that women have in various spaces.

In this quote, Claudia does not entirely fall into the narrative of progress that was shared in most interviews, after I asked them the exact same question above. Instead, she offers the narrative of “two Mexicos in one,” where contradictory gender models circulate. Claudia suggests that her mother and her grandmother exemplify the first model. She embodies the second one. While she does not describe the first model in this quote, most interviewees offered the notion that there exists a model of femininity that is bounded to the domestic sphere and serving the family. In this model women should not express their opinions too loudly. Some even used the term “submissiveness” to describe this model of femininity. Claudia suggests that many women are trying to break from this model. It is not a coincidence that Claudia places the *luchonas* in Iztapalapa, one of the poorest zones of the city, where inhabitants must struggle daily for basic services. The women’s popular movement has been active in Mexico City demanding basic services to the city’s administration that tends to ignore large parts of town inhabited by the working poor. By placing change at the heart of a working poor neighborhood, I believe that Claudia also wants to challenge the idea that poor women are more submissive than middle class professionals. Claudia is suggesting that having a professional career is not necessarily the ultimate indicator of change. Claudia, a psychologist working for an NGO, is a first generation university educated woman. She comes herself from the outskirts of Mexico City. She is thus somehow familiar with the middle-classes, while she inhabits a poor neighborhood where all of her extended family lives. Some middle-class professional women might have broken with the traditional model participating in the public sphere, but due to the present state of the economy they might be the only ones who can make the

choice of working or staying at home, “like 30 years ago.” The fact that Claudia places this model in the past, suggests that new models have emerged. They cohabit with what she labels as a past trend. With the rise of the Catholic right in the country, these models are nonetheless presently being widely disseminated. Perhaps this perspective is not surprising coming from one of the youngest interviewees, who lived almost half of her life in the era of the PAN right’s wing regime.<sup>31</sup> In a conversation in August 2010 with activist Rosalinda Ávila, she suggested that “*Lo que sí creo es que nosotras lo que aprendimos las feministas es lo siguiente: los avances al pasado no son para siempre. Puede haber retrocesos. Todo el asunto con el aborto lo demuestra/*what we, feminists, have learned is the following: progress made in the past is not forever. Things can go backwards. The abortion debate is the proof.” As abortion has now been criminalized in 18 Mexican States, Ávila reminds us that change does not only follow one direction. Yet, when we look at the different subject positions for women living their sexuality with women, we see that certain figures have emerged and disappeared through time. I discuss the appearance and disappearing of subject positions related to same-sex sexuality in the following pages.

### ***La tortillera***

The notion of homosexuality as it emerged in the European medical/scientific discourse has been documented by many scholars (see among others Foucault 1978,

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<sup>31</sup> It is important to state that under President Fox presidency (2000-2006), less far right wing party members occupied key positions than under Calderón’s presidency (2006-2012).

Halperin 1990, Katz 1995). In Mexico, the use of this notion has been identified since the late nineteenth century and twentieth century when Porfirian criminologists studied homosexuality among prison inmates (Buffington, 1997). However, it remains unclear if such a conceptualization of same-sex sexuality was common outside of educated elite circles. The notion of homosexuality appears to have emerged in the public sphere in Mexico in larger proportions with the rise of the LGBT movements that emerged in the 1970's. The notion of sexual identity has not entirely replaced other meanings attached to (male) same-sex sexuality. Studies in Mexico tend to indicate that those relations are often understood through the active/passive binary (Taylor 1986, Lumsden 1991, Carrier 1996, Prieur 1998, Nuñez Noriega 1999, Carrillo 2002).

Despite the rise of the notion of homosexuality in Mexico since the 1970s, interviewees often remarked that they had lived their formative years in environments where the notion rarely reached them. Liliana, 33 years old, for example told me in an interview that she had grown up, as completely unaware of any reference to homosexuality. Liliana spent most of her childhood and teenage years in Texcoco, a small town near Mexico City. As we discussed:

A: ¿Te hablaron del sexo?

L: ¿En mi casa? No. no. no. Ja, ja. Nunca, nunca, nunca.

A: ¿Y sobre la homosexualidad?

L: No, pues menos. Imagínate. Eso era como que no existe... Y precisamente por eso, yo crecí tan espantada, porque yo nunca, en mi casa, yo no lo escuché nunca. Yo al sentir esto me espanté mucho, porque yo no sabía que esto era posible. Nunca me imaginé realmente. No sabía que existía.

A: Did they talk to you about sex?

L: At home? No, no, no. Ha, Ha. Never, never, never.

A: And about homosexuality?

L: No, well even less. Imagine. That was like it does not exist... And for this reason, I grew up so scared, I never... At home, I never heard about it. When I felt that, I got very scared, because I did not know that this was possible. I really never imagined it. I did not know that it existed.

Liliana grew up with the notion that the only proper object of attraction was the opposite sex. As she recalls, when she felt “that,” which I interpret as attraction for the same-sex, she doubted the very existence of what she was feeling. Even in the horizon of imagination the possibility of desire towards the same-sex had never crossed her mind. Liliana’s narrative was, however, not necessarily the most common one.

While the notion of “homosexuality” did not always prevail, most women lived in a context where some individuals in their communities carried the stigma of the *tortillera*, the *rarito* or the *jota* of the neighborhood.<sup>32</sup> Yazmín, 51 years old, who grew up in a small town in the State of Jalisco remembered the following, when I asked her if she had heard of homosexuality growing up:

Yo creo que llegué a conocer unas gentes así pero la gente mayor se refería a ellos como raritos. Pero yo nunca escuché esa palabra de homosexualidad. Lesbiana. No. No cuando estuve ahí.

I think that I met some people who were like that, but older people referred to them as *raritos*. But I think I never heard the word homosexuality. *Lesbiana*. No. Not, when I was there at least.

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<sup>32</sup> A *tortillera* is literally a woman who makes tortillas. In slang, it can mean a female who practices same-sex sexuality. A *joto/a* is slang for a male who is a feminine passive homosexual. *Rarito* literally means strange, but is often used to point to someone out of the norm.

Similarly Bellota, 45 years old, does not recall hearing about homosexuality while growing up. She also indexes the characters of the *tortillera* and the *joto*, as corresponding to a different set of knowledge. She says:

No, eso no se hablaba. Ni se tocaba. A la mejor se hablaba no de homosexualidad sino de la tortillera...Mi papá a la mejor dentro de su situación, de ofender o algo. A la mejor no me daba mucho coraje, ni me ofendía mucho porque decía que yo era hermafrodita. Entonces hubo poca cultura de mi señor padre porque pues hermafrodita es otra cosa... pero él lo decía a la mejor de coraje, de sacar esa rabia... Mis hermanos así que los haya escuchado “mira ese jotito”... no, no, no, realmente era muy escondido...Casi, casi era como Sor Juana, convento...como que un pueblo...sí ya había electricidad pero las calles oscuras, oscuras.

No. They did not talk about this. They did not touch it at all. Maybe they did not talk about homosexuality, but about *tortilleras*. My dad might have used it, in a situation to offend or something like that. It did not make me angry, nor did it offend me that much because [he] used to say that I was a *hermafrodita*. My dad did not have much culture because hermaphrodite is something else... but he used to say it with anger, to let go of his rage... My brothers, I might have heard them say “Look at this *jotito*...” No, no, no it was very hidden... it was almost, almost like Sor Juana, her convent... a small village... there was already electricity but the streets were dark, dark.

While growing up, Bellota did not hear directly about homosexuality. Instead, she suggests that other words evoking same-sex sexuality were used in her town, including *tortillera*, *joto* and *hermaphrodita*. It is also strongly possible that these terms evoked a sense of gender non-conformity, as earlier in the interview Bellota speaks on how she had a very masculine appearance since she was a child. Her father first encouraged Bellota to wear masculine clothes, as he would bring her to his hardware store. However, when he realized that Bellota kept these clothes in all circumstances and took part in boy games, he began expressing his anger and calling her a *hermaphrodite*.

Bellota, who now lives in the Federal District, grew up in a small town in the contiguous State of Estado de Mexico. The streets were “dark, dark” implies somehow that the circulation of notions alluding to same-sex sexuality were mere shadows in the thick obscurity. She feels the need to precise that she is from a small town, implying that the notion of “homosexuality” might have been more prevalent in the Federal District in the 1970s and early 80s. Nonetheless, other interviewees, in particular of the same age cohort or older, also signaled that the rare occasions in which they heard any kind of reference to homosexuality, was as an insult under the terms *joto*, *marica*, *puto*, etc. All these terms are slang alluding to an effeminate homosexual. With the rare exception of *tortillera* and *marimacha*, most of the terms were used for men.

The *joto* and the *tortillera* might be seen as notions that form part of the popular knowledge that circulates in a community. While they are used as words to provoke an injury, they also evoke an isolated figure that stands out of the crowd for challenging the gender and sexual norms of a community. In many of the narratives of women over 45 years old, the figure of a masculine woman who first signified difference appears. The *marimachas* and *tortilleras* of those narratives spark light, implying the possibility of defying compulsory heterosexuality. The masculine woman is like a specter in a crowd. One is not sure of what they have seen, in which box of signification to place “her,” but it is a figure that certainly calls attention. Bellota recalls one of the first masculine women she met when she was 17 years old:

Te digo hace tiempo hice una técnica auxiliar y trabajé en el hospital de la Ciudad de Toluca. La telefonista, no pues estaba guapetona. Ojos verde, todo... y pues bien niño. Y una vez, estábamos una compañeras y yo

“¿Oye, la telefonista, es niña o niño?” No, pues es niña. Obvio la curiosidad... yo me fui haciendo su amiga...

I'm telling you, a while ago I did an auxiliary technique [in nursing] and I worked in a hospital in the city of Toluca. The operator, well she was handsome (*guapetona*). Green eyes and everything...and very boyish. One time my coworkers and I were saying “listen, is the operator a boy or a girl?” “No, well, she is a girl” Obviously, curiosity... and little by little I became her friend...

Bellota knew that she was different from other women, as she felt comfortable wearing manly clothes and liked girls at school. However, she had not envisioned the possibility until this moment that there were women like her. The operator stood as a signal, indicating a breach in the normative tissue. She symbolized the possibility of subverting norms that had appeared omnipotent, the only way to spell-out reality. Like the “tomboi” across Asia (Wieringa, Blackwood and Bhैया, 2007), or the “butch” in the North American context who is “the recognizable public form of lesbianism” (Munt, 1998: 54), the masculine *tortillera* is the symbol that marks the failure of compulsive heterosexuality and gender conformism. Bellota approached her perhaps out of curiosity or attraction (as she is “guapetona”), or out of identification. It is unclear, but Bellota felt the need to inquire about her world and befriend her. Similarly, Selva who grew up in the Federal District remembers having seen masculine women in her neighborhood. At a difference with the operator, there was a group of them as she remembers:

Yo veía unas chicas que jugaban fútbol, se vestían de niño, bueno con su uniforme. Cuando yo tenía 17 o 18 años. Me llamaban mucho la atención, porque yo las veía como niños. Yo sentía que eran parecidas a mí. Yo quería acercarme a ellas para preguntarles, para que me dijeran. No hubo oportunidad.

I used to see some girls who played soccer. They wore boy clothes, well their uniform, when I was 17 or 18 years old. They really used to call my

attention, because they looked like boys to me. I felt that they were similar to me. I wanted to approach them to ask them, for them to tell me [about their lives]. I did not get the opportunity.

In this narrative, it is clear that Selva wished to approach these masculine women, as she felt they were similar to her. These masculine figures are of crucial importance in the narratives because they signify a possibility that seemed absent before. For many women I interviewed, difference was not only lived in terms of desire, but also in terms of gender. I would say that this is even truer for women over 40 years old, who reported having grown up as tomboys, and to this day had rather a masculine self presentation. For these women, it was important to not only foresee the possibilities for desiring, loving and/or having erotic encounters with women, but also the possibility of living their lives as masculine women. At no moment Bellota or Selva speak of seeing these masculine women with lovers. Instead, they represent a figure of possibility in terms of their gender expression. However, there is often a link between this masculine appearance and a desire oriented towards women. Bellota remembered a second masculine female who marked her life:

A los 23-25... llegó una muchacha. Según ella quería ser periodista... era de la Ciudad de México. Llegó ahí a la cuadra a rentarle a una señora. No pues cuando la vi, dije, que niño más bonito, ¿no? Entonces era bien obvia... y pensábamos que realmente era un hombre, ¿no? No pues, nos hicimos amigas ...Se veía ....que conocía más mundo. Ahí es cuando me dijo “yo soy lesbiana”. Ahí siento como el canelo, no... “Yo te voy a llevar a un antro.” Ella me abrió mucho mundo.

When I was 23-25... a woman arrived [to town]. She wanted to be a journalist... and she was from Mexico City. She moved to our block and rented a room from an [aged] woman. When I saw her, I thought what a beautiful boy! She was obvious... and we thought that she really was a man, right? Well we became friends and... you could see... that she knew more about the world. That is when she tells me “I am a lesbian.” I felt

shivers, right? ... “I’ll bring you to a club,” [she said]. She opened a lot of the world to me.

While the journalist first appears as a solitary unconventional figure, we soon see that she has a broader network of relations than the one in town. In this broader set of interconnections, different knowledges circulate where there exists the possibility of relating to the label “lesbian.” During the interview, Bellota identified this moment, as the one when she began using the word “lesbian.” Through the masculine woman recently arrived in town, Bellota accesses new circuits of meaning that existed in the Federal District in the late 1980s. “I’ll bring you to a club” really meant: I’ll bring you into a new world where there exists the possibility of living life as a ‘lesbian.’ The connotation of lesbian is here unclear, but the journalist clearly does not say “I’m a lesbian, I am doomed,” but rather “I am a lesbian and I want to show you out there a world where this is possible.” By that time, María Luisa, Elrolloes, Martha, Sandra, and Lydia, whom I interviewed were already part of this world, they had found in all cases through neighborhood or school friends or colleagues. Others were living their desire oriented towards women in isolation. For example, Alicia, who was 65 years old had had partners since her twenties. However, she did not know of lesbians organizations, clubs or bars until 1995.

In other narratives that also take place in the late 1980s, the term ‘lesbian’ is not necessarily celebrated. Tania, for example, who was at that moment about seven years old, remembers her mother using the term *lesbiana* despicably:

Una vez mi mamá, no sé, la verdad no recuerdo lo que estaba sucediendo, estaba con una amiga y tenía 7 o 8 años. La verdad no sé lo que estaba

pasando, yo sé que no la estaba besando porque besé a una chica hasta los 21. Pero mi mamá estaba muy enojada, vino por mí y me jaló del brazo y me dijo: “Es que tú vas a ser una lesbiana.” Entonces fue la primera vez que escuche esa palabra. Yo, no sabía que era, pero X...

Once my mother...I was with a friend when I was 7 or 8 years old. The truth is that I do not remember what was happening. I know, I was not kissing her because I did not kiss a woman until I was 21 years old. But my mother was very mad. She came to get me and pulled my arm yelling “Oh you! You will become a lesbian!” So that was the first time I heard the word. I did not know what it was, but whatever.

Tania’s mother corrects her daughter’s behavior that implied presumably lesbianism. ‘Lesbian’ here, is not used as an insult, but as an ontological label. As Bellota’s father whom called her a ‘hermaphrodite’ when she was a child a few decades before, Tania’s mother was visibly angry while using the word ‘lesbiana.’ Even if Tania does not know immediately what the term lesbian means, she grows up in a world where the idea of being a ‘lesbian’ is not as buried in the “dark, dark.” However, because of her mother’s attitude, one can deduce that it is not seen as a positive term.

As time goes by, we begin seeing short-circuits in compulsory heterosexuality. An increasing amount of lesbian figures appear in the narratives, even before subjects begin participating in *el ambiente*. In early 2000s, Selene, 23 years old, remembers having open ‘lesbian’ friends when she turned 15 years old. She recalls how her friends marked her *quinceañera* celebration:

Mi mejor amiga Carrie es lesbiana y andaba con otra amiga mía...recuerdo que cuando fueron a mi fiesta de 15 años que me hizo mi mamá, para mí era muy difícil que ellas fueran entonces me daba pavor que las vieran. Incluso ahora creo que era un poco de lesbofobia...en el sentido de que a mí me iban a creer lesbiana, entonces mi mundo se va a acabar... Me acuerdo que se pelearon además. Las mujeres tienen problemas, sus peleas las vuelven muy emotivas, muy emocionales...por

la cultura...Entonces fue una pelea muy violenta. Porque se enoja porque estaba bailando con otra amiga. Una se sale corriendo a las 11 de la noche en una colonia que ni conoce. Y va la otra siguiéndola corriendo y mi papá ve. Y luego sale mi otra amiga a perseguir la otra... [mi papá] ve que mis tres amigas van corriendo muy lejos “y súbanse, ahorita las alcanzamos”. Todo el mundo se dio cuenta. A mí me daba miedo, la burla que me van a salir. ¿Qué me van a hacer porque mis amigas son lesbianas? Y si pues, a la burla.

My best friend Carrie is a lesbian and she used to date another of my friends... I remember when they came to my fifteenth year-old birthday party, which my mother organized for me. I had a hard time with the idea of them coming. I was so scared that they would see them. Even, now I think that it was a bit of lesbophobia... in the sense that they would think I was a lesbian and my world would end. I even remember that they fought. Women ...quarrel... very emotionally... because of culture...So it was a very violent fight. She got mad because [her girlfriend] was dancing with another friend. One just left running at 11pm in a neighborhood she did not even know. And the other one runs after her and my dad sees that. And then my other friend runs after the other one... my dad sees that my three friends are running very far and [he says] “come in the car, we’ll catch up with them”. Everyone noticed. I was scared about how they would mock me. What will they do because my friends are lesbians? And well yes, they made fun of me.

Traditionally, women celebrate the *quinceañera*, a Catholic celebration, when they turn fifteen. This event marks the transition from childhood to womanhood. The young woman usually wears a beautiful dress and dances with her *chambelanes* (young men). It is traditionally her first public dance with the opposite sex. Forget about *chambelanes*, pink dresses and cake: Selene’s *quinceañera* is inhabited by free flow dancing, lesbian drama and lesbophobic mockery. Selene was not aware of her desire for women at the time, yet she was familiar with the possibility of lesbian relations, as her best friends at school identified as lesbians. While the label ‘best friend’ suggests that she appreciates Carrie, Selene at that time felt uneasy with her friend’s relationship being publicly stated. She feared mockery from her family and friends, but even more troubling, what if they

thought she was a lesbian too? Her “world would end.” In order for her world to stay in place, she must visibly comply with compulsory heterosexuality. ‘Lesbian’ or attraction towards women appears as a possibility. Two or three of her friends certainly confirm this in Selene’s world. However, the narrative suggests that there are still costs associated with identifying with such label, in this case principally mockery and world-implosion. The night of Selene’s symbolic introduction to heterosexual society becomes rather a queer introduction, where girls dancing with girls create drama and men remain largely absent, with the exception of her father’s panoptical presence. We are far from the spectral figure of the masculine female that once marked a different possibility. Lesbians are openly present from teenagehood. In the following section I expand on the subject position of *la lesbiana* through the narratives of interviewees.

### ***La Lesbiana***

*La lesbiana* is a character from which many women have run away from, across time, in Mexico City. While many women adopt her desires, gestures, attitudes, etc. many shared that they did not name themselves as such. “It is a very strong word,” say Selva and Mónica and many other women I interviewed. They choose other words to speak of themselves or an aspect of their sexuality: *levis*, *lencha*, *gay*, *de ambiente*, etc. Each one of these words positions the subject slightly differently than *la lesbiana*. But what is it about *lesbiana* that provokes fear to associate ourselves with the word? *La lesbiana* forms part of the medical/scientific vocabulary, which in the near past qualified her as a mentally ill. She is the product of a confessional culture that located her sexuality as the

mere truth about the self, and constituted her as the female version of the homosexual, in Foucault's (1978) words as part of another species. In public life, *la lesbiana* is the figure par excellence of the woman who engages in same-sex sexual practices. *La lesbiana* is also one of those words that men and women in the sexual diversity movements and *el ambiente* in general have trafficked to coat with a different set of meanings, to engender a new sense, free of negative connotations. Some of the women who use this word for themselves remember part of the history that changed the sense of the term *lesbiana*. For example, Selene tells us that *lesbiana* carries a story that began in the 1970s:

Generalmente, digo que soy lesbiana. Pero una cuestión totalmente destinada a la preferencia sexual creo que soy pansexual. Yo me enamoro de las personas, si tienen un pene, una vagina... Pero me identifico como una persona lesbiana, más por una cuestión cultural, más política. Creo que ser lesbiana, no significa una preferencia sexual sino implica una serie de cosas que se han ido dando aquí en México desde los 70. Implica una cultura, implica un conocimiento... En ese sentido, considero que soy lesbiana. Realmente, no sé si voy a acabar compartiendo mi vida con un hombre o una mujer. Dudo mucho que sea con un hombre porque la sociedad no está tan avanzada como para que un hombre acepte que su novia es lesbiana o yo que sé.

Generally, I say that I am a *lesbiana*. If we think completely in terms of sexual preferences, I think that I am pansexual. I can fall in love with people who have a penis or a vagina... But I identify more as a *lesbiana*, because of cultural and political reasons. I think that being a lesbian, does not mean a sexual preference. It implies instead a couple of things that have happened in Mexico since the 1970s. It implies a culture, a knowledge... In this sense, I consider that I am a lesbian. I really do not know, if I will end up sharing my life with a man or a woman. I really doubt that it will be with a man because society is not progressive enough for a man to accept that his girlfriend is lesbian, or what do I know.

In this sense of the term *lesbiana*, we are far from the small town lonely *raritas*. *Lesbiana* relates to a social network of individuals, to "a culture, to a knowledge." The *lesbiana* does not only desire, she knows the lesbian world: her gestures, her words, the way to

interact in a culture that celebrates 40 years of existence in Mexico. Selene even says that the orientation of love and desire, are not of much worth to gain the label. She could therefore live her life with a man and continue being a lesbian.

The social and political culture mentioned by Selene was often related to lesbian feminism. Luisa, 31 years old, preferred to use the term “gay” for herself. When I asked her why she responds:

L: Porque lesbiana ya no. Al principio sí. Cuando me describí que ya no conocía más. Pero ya no porque, no me identifico... Porque lesbiana se me hace combativa, muy otras cosas que no, que siento que no soy. Entonces gay me identifico más. Bueno dos palabras mujer gay.

A: ¿Y otras cosas que combativa?

L: Feminista ... Activista.

A: ¿Hace mucho que adoptaste la palabra gay?

L: Hace como 7 o 8 años.

A: ¿Y tuviste un proceso para adoptar esa palabra?

A: Si fue más como alejarme del activismo. Decir. No realmente no me gusta. No soy así... Más bien al principio sentía: si soy lesbiana tengo que ser feminista, creo que tengo que ser así....

L: I don't use *lesbiana* anymore. When I came out and I did not know anything else [I did]. But no longer, because I do not identify with it... because *lesbiana* feels like very combative, many more things I do not feel I am. So I identify more with gay. Well, two words, gay woman.

A: And other things than combative?

L: Feminist... activist

A: When did you begin using “gay”?

L: 7 or 8 years ago.

A: Did you go through a process to adopt this word?

L: Yes, it was when I moved away from activism. When I said I don't really like that.

I'm not like that...In fact at first I felt like, if I am a lesbian I have to be a feminist, I think that I have to be like this...When she first began visiting queer spaces almost ten years ago, Luisa went to El Clóset de Sor Juana. Luisa was never heavily involved in activism, but she participated in demonstrations and diverse activist actions. In my perspective Luisa continues being politically active, as from time to time she writes on lesbian lives on the blog of a queer women organization. However, her politics did not coincide with the ones of lesbian feminists, whom in her perspective are the *lesbianas*.

When I asked women why they used the word *lesbiana* to refer to themselves, the most frequent answer was that it was the right word. Tania was one of the interviewees who used the term *lesbiana* for herself. When I asked her why she mentioned the following:

T: Porque es la primera que conocí. Y creo que la más acertada. También me gusta el término gay, pero el término gay lo usan más como para niños. Pero bueno podría ser gay o lesbiana, cualquiera de las dos.

A: ¿Y recuerdas cuando empezaste a utilizar esa palabra?

T: A los 21 años... bueno yo tenía una relación con un chico 5 años. Nos acabábamos de ir a vivir juntos... Y yo empecé a soñar que tenía cosas que ver con chicas. Eso me empezó a hacerme preguntar, "qué onda porqué sueño esto?" También cuando yo tenía vida sexual con este niño yo pensaba "¡Ay! ¿A poco esto es lo wow, lo maravilloso, lo extraordinario? O sea, ni al caso." Yo decía, cómo les puede gustar esto ¿no? ¿Qué onda, qué hay de especial, de emocionante? Y bueno tenía una amiguita que me traía loquita desde tres años atrás. Cuando estos sueños. Ella era la del sueño, ¿no? Entonces como que eso hizo cuestionarme mucho. Y esta chava por ejemplo, podía influir mucho en mí, mis emociones. Entonces, eso fue determinante. Eso fue que dije "¿A ver qué me sucede? ...porqué ella me puede hacer sentir muy bien, muy mal? Así fue.

T: It was the first one that I heard and it is the most appropriate one. I also like the term gay, but the term gay is generally used for men. But it could be gay or *lesbiana*, any of these two.

A: And do you remember when you began using this word?

T: ... When I was 21 years old... I had been in a relationship with a man for five years. We had just moved in together...I began dreaming that I had something with women. That made me question: "Why am I dreaming this?" When I had a sexual life with this guy I used to think: "Is this really like wow, marvelous, extraordinary?" I mean not even a bit. I used to think, how can they like this? What is the deal, what is special or thrilling about this? And I had a friend who had been driving me crazy for the past 3 years... She was the one in my dreams. So it made me question myself a lot. And this girl had a strong influence on me, on my emotions. So that was determining. That is when I said: "Ok, so what is happening... How can she make me feel so well, or so bad?"

In this interview excerpt the term *lesbiana* appears entangled with the notion of sexual desire. As Tania remarks, she associates using the word with being uninterested by sex with a man and having erotic dreams about her friend. However, she recognizes that it was not only the dreams filled with desire for a woman that led her to question herself, but also the kind of influence her friend had on her emotions. In this sense, Tania also suggests that certain kinds of feeling for a woman "who drove her crazy," were also questionable. Sexual desire only began the process of questioning.

Yvonne, 38 years old, also emphasized feelings, in relation to the term *lesbiana*. She links her description to love. Her explanation is, however, contingent upon the situation in which she suggests, she used and explained *lesbiana*:

Lesbiana. Eso sí. Lo utilizo mucho, sobre todo para dejarles muy claro a mis sobrinos. Ellos son chicos de 11 de 12, 18 años que ya empiezan a preguntar. Y mis hermanos sí se atorán un poco en ese sentido. Acerca de la homosexualidad y ser lesbiana y en la educación que más o menos le manejan a sus hijos. Es justamente decirles "lesbiana". "¿Qué es

lesbiana?” “Una chica que está con otra chica, porque se aman.” Sí manejo más eso de lesbiana.

*Lesbiana.* Yes. I use it a lot, particularly to make it very clear to my nephews. They are 11, 12 and 18 year-old boys and they are beginning to ask questions. And my brothers get stuck a little bit, regarding the education they are providing to them in relation to homosexuality and being a lesbian. It’s about telling them “lesbiana,” “what is lesbiana? . “A girl who is with another girl because they love each other.” So I use the term lesbiana.

In this interview excerpt Yvonne deploys a form of “strategic essentialism” (Spivak, 1990) to make it clear to her nephews that she is with a woman. Yvonne had made use of the term homosexual as well in the past to describe herself. It was difficult for her to begin using the term *lesbiana* that she categorized as many others as “una palabra muy fuerte” (a strong word).

#### *The Great Closet of Traditional Female Sexuality*

But let’s start at the beginning. *La lesbiana* is a woman. Therefore, most people expect her to behave as a *mujercita*, in particular when it comes to sexuality. Although social actors such as schools, the media, governmental campaigns on health and population, feminist and LGBT movements have promoted new ideas that at times differ from the Catholic ideals on sexuality (Amuchástegui, 2001), women remain evaluated through the notion of double morality.<sup>33</sup> The traditional notion of double morality divides women between “good” and “bad” women, in relation to their sexual behavior. On June 6, 2011, about 10, 000 people walked down the streets of Mexico City, in *La Marcha de*

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<sup>33</sup> The Catholic ideals that give place to the virgin/whore binary remain present, but not as dominant as in previous generations. Today the religious origin of these ideals is at times left aside (Amuchástegui and Rivas Zivy 1999, Amuchástegui 2001). It has been reconstructed as a secular moral system, although it is important to note that in the past decade religious and political discourses have increasingly been intertwined.

*las Putas*- The March of the Sluts- a global initiative that first took place in Toronto, Canada (Campuzano, 2011). The March of the Sluts had the objective to denounce sexual violence. Anthropologist Martha Lamas (2011), who took part in the march, also remarks that the *Marcha de las Putas* is also “a struggle for the symbolic resignifying, which does not only end with the ideological separation between decent women and *putas*, but it does provoke a very necessary reflection in relation to double morality.”<sup>34</sup> She suggests that ‘whore’ is not a term only used for sexual workers, “it is used to qualify women who do not follow the norms of “decency” (for having sexual relations freely or for wearing attractive clothes).”<sup>35</sup>

This binary system has not much to say on lesbianism per se. It simply suggests that ‘decent’ women should be sexually passive, tie sexuality to procreation and marriage, at a difference with “bad” women who actively engage with sexuality regardless of marital status (Rivas Zivy, 1998, Amuchástegui, 2001, Carrillo, 2002, Hirsch, 2003). Nonetheless, it is of prime importance to review its implications in order to understand “who” is *la lesbiana* in relation to dominant social and cultural norms. Interviews revealed that during their formative years most women were told they should be passive or uninterested by sexuality. In his research on AIDS and reproduction in Oaxaca, Mexico, Gutmann (2007) found that men and women’s sexuality were treated

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<sup>34</sup> *Marcha de las Putas*, una batalla por la resignificación simbólica que, aunque no acaba por sí sola con la separación ideológica entre las mujeres decentes y las putas, provoca una reflexión muy necesaria respecto a la doble moral.

<sup>35</sup> Se usa para calificar a las mujeres que no se ajustan a los lineamientos de “decentes” (sea porque tienen relaciones sexuales libres o simplemente porque visten de manera llamativa)...

differently. Similarly, interviewees of all ages had had a very distinct sexual education than their brothers. Selene explains:

A las mujeres, siempre se nos ha asignado un papel pasivo. Un papel a que debes de esperar a que te cortejen... alguien llegue y te empiece a cortejar y tú aunque te guste, te niegas tres veces antes de enseñar [la cara]. Eso es algo que cargamos, aunque digas que no o quieras deshacerte de eso... Las mujeres mientras más parejas tengan, hombres... Es una prostituta, una ramera, etc. En cambio los hombres, es símbolo de un buen macho....

Women have always been assigned the passive role. A role where you have to wait to be seduced... someone arrives they flirt and even if you like it, you deny it three times before responding. That is something that we carry, even if you want to get rid of it. A woman that has many male partners... is a prostitute, a *ramera*, etc. Differently, for men it's the symbol of being a good macho...

As Selene suggests, women are socialized to publicly pay little attention to desire. Along with the Catholic ideals on sexuality, they are supposed to demonstrate a certain sexual restraint. Selene's statement demonstrates that the transgression of traditional ideals does not begin necessarily with sexual relations. Even the act of expressing interest in a man too quickly, might give place to the "whore" category. In this perspective, a woman who approaches a man would challenge the ideal of female sexual passivity. In her ethnography on marriage in a town of Northern Mexico, Hirsch (2003) describes how young women waited for men to approach them, otherwise facing the risk of being called *aventadas* (gutsy). Claudia, 23 years old, noticed as well that there was a difference between the ways in which sexuality was supposed to play a role in her life in comparison to her brother. When I asked her what she remembers she was told about dating at home, she said:

Me decían hasta que terminara una carrera o que tuviera un trabajo estable. Incluso mi papá manejaba una broma, de que cuando yo cumpliera 15 años iba a poner fuera de la casa un cañón, para cuando cualquier persona que se acercara le iba a disparar. Muy chistoso. Mi papá por ejemplo es muy de “es mi niña, no la toquen” Mientras mi hermano dice “agarren a sus gallinas que mi gallo anda suelto.” Entonces, no, mis primeros novios, yo los mantenía ocultos...

They used to tell me that only until I finished my studies or until I had a stable job. My dad even had this joke, that when I would turn 15 he was going to put canons around the house, and if anyone approached he was going to shoot them... My dad for example is really about “It’s my daughter, don’t touch her.” But for my brother he says “hold your hens, my rooster is on the loose.” So my first boyfriends, I would maintain them in secret...

As Claudia remarks, her brother’s sexual assertiveness was celebrated, while no man was welcomed to approach the house to meet with her. It is no coincidence that 15 years of age corresponds to the moment in which her father jokes that he will put “canons” around the house, as this is commonly when the *quinceañera* celebration takes place. While Claudia received precise instructions on when she could start dating, other women were told indirectly. Bellota, 45 years old, remembers when the shift happened and how it seemed contradictory to her:

Mis hermanos decían, cuidadito si te vemos con un canijo, porque lo correteamos a ti y a él. Y cuidadito que te veamos las uñas pintadas, y cuidadito que te viéramos los ojos pintados. Yo no sé si era porque mi padre decía que las que estaban pintadas de las uñas y de la cara y eso, pues eran las mujeres de la vida galante, ¿no? Entonces, ya cuando estaba uno más grande, si había la situación opcional de que si te querías pintar... Y luego lo que yo le decía a mi mamá: “O que la, primero que no me pinte, que me iban a correr al novio y después píntate, porque te vistes así, porque no te pones falda” ¡Un poco contradictorio!...

My Brothers used to say, be careful, if we see you with a guy, because we will kick both of you. And be careful if we see you with nail polish and eye shadow. I don’t know if that was because my father used to say that women who painted their nails, were prostitutes, right? So when you

were a little bit older you could wear make-up if you wanted. I would tell my mother “Oh, first don’t wear make-up, I’ll kick out the boyfriend and after wear make-up. Why do you dress like this? Why don’t you wear skirts?” A little contradictory!

Bellota’s words suggest that the strategy to find a boyfriend rested on cultivating a certain appearance. Make-up, skirts and dresses are aesthetic elements that mark femininity, as women wear them. While we do not hear further of Bellota’s mother advice on how to seduce, other interviewees suggested that this did not mean one had to date many men.

On the contrary, Liliana, 33 years old, voiced that she was told:

No teníamos que andar ahí loqueando hasta que de veras haya un muchacho que en verdad le conviniera, ¿No? Que era buen chico. Entonces, no, no podíamos andar así... Mucho menos andar embarazandonos chiquitas. .. No, no, no. Hasta que nos casáramos y nada de eso.

We could not go acting crazy around, until there was a guy that would really be good for us. A good guy. So we could not just be around... we could even less get pregnant young. No, no, no, until we got married and nothing else.

For a period of their lives Claudia, Bellota, Liliana and most other interviewees were told that they should not be seen with men. The fact that women of all ages remembered the same message suggests that despite the insertion of new discourse on sexuality, Catholic ideals on sexuality continue having an important weight. In a study on three generations, younger women related more sexuality to eroticism and pleasure, but the virgin/whore binary remained present in their perspectives (Rivas-Zivy, 1998). In this sense, women often develop strategies of secrecy to circumvent the norms in their youth. Time comes for women to have a boyfriend, as Bellota’s narrative suggests. However, when there exists a certain expectation for women to date (ideally with marriage in mind), virginity

or discretion is expected in relation to sexuality. This idea of restraint, secrecy, imprisoned feelings strangely resonates with a well-known narrative in *el ambiente*, which is the one of the closet, or rather said in the context of Mexico City *el clóset*. As in the North American context, the narrative of *el clóset* serves a spatial metaphor for the moment in which the subject has not asserted publicly a homosexual identity. For women, the narrative of *el clóset* is in some ways a continuation of the ways in which they are taught to treat sexuality from a young age.

By suggesting that for women there exists a continuum between the two *clósets*, or that for women there exists the big and spacious *clóset* of female sexuality, I do not want to imply that women are more “in the closet” than other genders that participate in *el ambiente*. My study does not permit such affirmation. In fact the women I spoke with were open to their social networks about their partners, preference for women, etc. However, I believe that in order to understand who is *la lesbiana* in Mexican society, it is important to know that she possibly had to open two doors to step out of the *clóset* or from the house to the streets.

I interviewed Yazmín, 51 years old, at a Starbucks on *Reforma Ave.* on a Saturday afternoon. In the empty café, she told me, as many women of her age, that “sex was a taboo” in her family and she had not heard anything about it while growing up. On the following question, I asked her if she had heard of homosexuality during the same time period. She used literally the same words as Liliana quoted above, as she said: “Even less, even less.” As we watched traffic go by, she told me of her previous marriage to a man. She was around 33 years old when she began realizing that she felt attracted to one

of her neighbors. This was only the starting point of acknowledging her attraction for this woman, as she says:

Si. Tuve un proceso muy largo. Muy, muy fuerte. Primero para aceptarme yo. Porque yo no sabía qué me estaba pasando. Ignoraba muchas cosas acerca de la sexualidad y como siempre me decían que era un tabú todo eso, no está permitido. Entonces, tenía mucho miedo ¿no? Y tuve que recurrir a psicólogos para que me ayudaran.

Yes. I had a very long process. Very, very strong. First to accept myself, because I did not know what was happening to me. I did not know a lot of things about sexuality, since they always had told me that it was all taboo and not permitted. So I was very scared, right? I had to go to a psychologist, to get some help.

In this paragraph, Yazmín talks of a process “to accept herself.” As she suggests, it was not only the fact that she was attracted to a woman that was scary to her, but rather her venturing in the land of forbidden taboos, namely sexuality.

### *Heavy doors*

Although it is important, to put into doubt the narratives of progress, many of the narratives I gathered suggest that doors used to be heavier. Nonetheless, at the time of the interview, women in their 20s were often the ones who were in constant conflict with their families, friends, etc. around issues surrounding their sexualities. Mónica, who was almost 40 at the time of the interview, remembered how her mother wanted to kick her out of the house in her 20s, when she learned Mónica was a lesbian:

Me corrió pero no le hice caso. Y me acuerdo que fue una etapa muy difícil para mí. Porque mi mamá me decía como cosas muy hirientes. Me decía que cómo que así como era, nadie me iba a querer. Que iba a estar sola. Que de qué había valido que me pagaran la educación si había salido lesbiana, ¿no? Y cosas de ese tipo...Este fue muy fuerte para mí porque mi mamá me estaba diciendo cosas como muy duras y me alejé mucho de ella, ¿no? Y pues como soy muy terca, o sea se la imponía...Entonces

cuando había eventos así del día de la madre o algo así, llegaba con ella y mi mamá se enfurecía y me reía y me salía. O sea me gustaba provocarla. Hasta que un día tuvimos una pelea y me estuvo persiguiendo con un cuchillo y le dije que yo iba a hacer mi vida con ella, sin ella o sobre ella, así que ella escogía. Nos dejamos de hablar un mes. Y luego me dijo que me quería mucho fuera como fuera y después se hizo súper amiga de Paty y ahora se llevan muy bien. Ja, ja, ja.

She kicked me out but I did not pay attention to her. And I remember that it was a very difficult moment for me because my mother would tell me very hurtful things. She would tell me: “How is it possible that you are like that?” [She would say] that no one was going to love me, that I would be alone. It hadn’t worth it to pay for my education, if I had turned out to be a *lesbiana*... and stuff like that. It was very intense for me because my mother was saying very harsh things and I grew apart from her, right? I’m pretty stubborn, so I used to impose [my girlfriend] on her. So when there were events, like mother’s day or something like that, I would show up with her and my mother would get so furious and I would laugh and leave. I liked provoking her. Until one day we had a fight and she ran after me with a knife and I told her that I would have her in my life, or live without her or over her, so she could chose. We stopped talking for a month. And then she told me that she loved me very much no matter how I was. She became very good friend with Patty after that and now they get along very well. Ha, ha, ha.

Like Mónica, many women in their 20s were experiencing the kinds of conflicts that she had experienced over a decade ago. Most did not involve the menace of a knife, but there was a sense of strain in many of the stories about the lives of the younger women. This was despite the fact that they had grown in a context where *la lesbiana* was much more part of public life. It worth noting, however that younger generations who position themselves as *lesbianas* had access to a distinct repertoire to challenge their families and communities. The circulation of the term *lesbiana* in public life, the proliferation of feminist and LGBT organizations and places offer a different set of tools. This is also true for families and communities. Nadine, whom I did not interview, commented informally that she did not like to bring her queer friends home because they had to act and talk

differently. For Nadine spaces of *el ambiente* were important because she could meet her friends there and be herself. Her parents were nonetheless making efforts to understand her. At Nadine's great surprise, her mother had decided to do a research on lesbophobia for a graduate course she was taking. Nadine's mother had to make a presentation of this project in front of her colleagues. After the presentation, she told her daughter that she admired her for being so courageous and for defending her rights, as Nadine was involved in lesbian activism.

Nadine's mother was not the only parent who demonstrated interest in being better educated about the lives lived by their children. Luisa of 32 years old recalled with amusement the difficulties she had had with her parents when she came out. Today Luisa's mother walked for pride and wore a T-shirt that said "Mi hija es gay y la amo" (My daughter is gay and I love her). Luisa had encouraged her mother to participate in the activities of the *Grupo de Madres y Padres por La Diversidad Sexual* (Group of mothers and fathers for sexual diversity), a group for parents of LGBT daughters and sons. On March 4<sup>th</sup> 2010, same-sex marriage became legal in the Federal District. At the public celebration that took place at the Hemiciclo a Juárez in la Alameda Central, the Grupo mentioned above was one of the organizations that spoke. The repertoire goes beyond institutional resources as Yoshi, 23 years old, talked about the fact that when her mother learned that she identified as a lesbian, her uncles and aunts made fun of her mother for being troubled about the news. They suggested that nowadays, this was rather normal.

*La lesbiana* as a woman that breaks the norms has something akin to *la puta*, in Mexican society. As a woman she is materially and symbolically poor. She does not own the masculine, privileged social class or cosmopolitan prestige of *el gay*. As Mexican chronicler Carlos Monsiváis (2007: 29) has suggested: “Defamation does not attain “gay” anymore, it is a word that comes from globalization that connects simultaneously civil rights with consumer society.”<sup>36</sup>*La lesbiana* struggles, *la lesbiana* struggles because of all cultural weight she carries on her back as a turtle-house.

### ***La bisexual***

Sustained desire for a woman might not lead to the conclusion that one is a *lesbiana*. Quetzal, for example, suggested during the interview that she related more closely to the label *bisexual*, a category that she considers to be largely invisible in Mexico. *La bisexual* also first emerges in the medical/scientific vocabulary. As *la lesbiana* she challenges the traditional norms of female sexuality. In the narratives of various interviewees, *la bisexual* is, however, even less understood than *la lesbiana*. Perhaps, as in the North American case because of strict notions of sexual identity that rest on a binary, bisexuals inhabit a liminal position (Rust, 2002).

I interviewed Quetzal on a Friday night at a café on the Zócalo of Coyoacán. “What a bad idea to do the interview here!” I thought to myself, walking through the multitudes that were at this popular plaza, enjoying their free Friday night. As I was

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<sup>36</sup> My translation

approaching the center of the plaza I recognized Quetzal who was wearing a blue dress and standing near the fountain. We had met at Musas de Metal the previous week, where she offered to be interviewed after I made an announcement to meeting participants. We managed to find a café and a table located at the far end corner of the locale where we could have a more intimate conversation. Quetzal, 43 years old, is a biologist who works for a research institute. She was one of the three women I interviewed who claimed to have attended some of the meetings of the bisexual group Opción Bi. Claudia, Safi and Quetzal, mentioned that more men than women were present at the meetings of the group. Nonetheless, it was the only bisexual group that was meeting at the time of fieldwork. Quetzal described her desire to be oriented towards “human beings.” As she says:

Q: Empiezo más a ir al grupo a estar más en el ambiente LGBT, estar también en el grupo de bisexuales y eso darne cuenta que en general me gustan mujeres. Puedo ver a una chica trans y me puede gustar, puedo ver a dos chicos gays y me fascinan, como que a la mejor no puede haber algo porque no quieren pero me pueden gustar, o sea en sí el ser humano.

A: Nunca sabes. Una entrevistada, su mejor relación era con un hombre gay.

Q: Yo digo, me gustan los seres humanos... pero ahora cuando estoy en el medio te puedo decir me gustan femeninas, masculinas, andróginas... Sí hay una tendencia, prefiero las estructuras más bien delgadas, normalitas a delgaditas, no muy llenitas... hombre o mujer...

Q: I begin to go more to the group, to be more part of *el ambiente* LGBT, to be in the group of bisexuals and realizing that in general I like women. I can look at a trans woman and I can like her, I can see two gay men and I'm enchanted, perhaps nothing can take place because they do not want but I can like them, I can like human beings.

A: You never know, an interviewee said that her best relationship had been with a gay man.

Q: I say, I like human beings... when I am in the milieu I can tell you that I like feminine ones, masculine ones, androgynous... I still have a tendency to prefer small frames, rather skinny, normal to skinny, not to too big... men or women...

Quetzal is aware of her preference for skinny body types. However, her desire is not limited to a single gender or gender expression. Similarly, to Selene quoted above she is attracted to men and women, but she uses the label bisexual instead of *lesbiana*, as Selene does. As sociologist Arlene Stein points out about sexual identities: “There are many possible configurations of the relationship between desire, practice and identity— many more such configurations than there are social categories to describe them” (1997b: 382). Interviewees, who claimed having a “pansexual” sexual preference in the words of Selene, used the terms *lesbiana*, *bisexual*, or no labels for themselves. I also heard the term *heteroflexible*, which was used for individuals who identified as heterosexuals but engaged from time to time in same-sex practices. Interviewee narratives also suggested at time that they had dated what they called *heterosexual* women.

Quetzal expressed that the use of the label bisexual in and out of *el ambiente* has its costs in Mexico City:

A nivel de los grupos me ha conflictuado porque si estoy en el grupo de lesbianas, “¿Cómo me atrevo a hablar de los hombres?”, si estoy en el rollo de los heterosexuales “pues cómo se te ocurre, hombres y mujeres? Pues decídete” Pues ya me decidí. Hay una decisión. Entonces, estas cosas de a veces, de cargar con ciertos prejuicios “de eres inestable, eres indecisa”...O sea, por ejemplo, cuando digo, “yo no creo en el matrimonio,” “ah sí, porque eres bisexual.” “No, antes de darme cuenta de que era bisexual”...

In terms of groups it has been confusing because if I am in a lesbian group, “How do I dare to talk about men?” if I am in the heterosexual world “what’s on your mind, men and women? Well, decide!” Well, I’ve

made my decision. There is a decision. So, this thing about carrying prejudices sometimes. “You are unstable, undecided”... So for example, when I say “I don’t believe in marriage,” “Oh yes, because you are bisexual”, “No! Before I even realized that I was bisexual.”

Quetzal’s statement suggests that dominant discourses of sexual identity force subjects into subject positions that are confined along the homosexual/heterosexual binary. Bisexual practice and identity defies the rigid binary categorization that has become prevalent in Mexican public life. Interestingly, in this narrative, it is not so much the weight of homophobia that is the most challenging, as her friends ask her to “decide.” It is rather the elopement of the homosexual and heterosexual categories that leads to discrimination. In lesbian groups as in the so called heterosexual world, Quetzal suggests that it has been difficult to find her place. Later in the interview she discusses how she believed that *el ambiente* would be inclusive, but instead she found a world cut *a la carte*, particularly in terms of groups. Once she ended her first relationship with a woman, she had lived out of *el ambiente*, she began looking for queer women groups. As she says:

Cuando yo termino con Leticia, me quedo “¿qué hago?” Empiezo a buscar. En mi familia, si hubo o no gays o lesbianas, esos son secretos... O sea, mi única relación con el mundo gay era Leticia... Cuando entro a este asunto y empiezo a buscar quién soy, qué me pasa, fue un poco frustrante para mí llegar y encontrar que había grupos como muy limitados. Por ejemplo “mayores de 30.” Ay chinga. ¿Si son menores no, o cómo? Y “lesbianas universitarias.” ¿Y si no eres culta, o si no tienes cierto nivel, no entras? En el grupo dijeron, “Tu eres bisexual, pues hay un grupo.”... No me gustó. ¿No que aquí, son diversos? ¿Qué pasa?... O llegar a un grupo de “lesbianas feministas,” “Ah. Bang! Bang! Bang!” Obviamente los grupos se van conformando en función de ideas... pero para mí... el hablar abiertamente en los grupos, de lo que pienso y lo que siento [ha sido difícil].

When I ended my relationship with Leticia “What do I do?” I begin to search. In my family if there were or not gays or lesbians, those are secrets... I mean my only relation to the gay world was Leticia. When I

get into this and I begin looking for who I am and what is happening to me, it was a little bit frustrating for me to... find that there were groups with clear boundaries. For example, *Mayores de 30* (older than 30). Oh God! And if you are younger not, you don't get in? And university lesbians. And if you are not educated, if you don't have a certain degree, you can't be in? In the [queer women] group they said: "You are bisexual. Well, there is a group"... I did not like that. "Isn't it diverse here? What's going on?"... Or you arrive to a lesbian feminist group. "Ah! Bang! bang! bang! [shooting me]." Obviously groups solidify around ideas... but for me to speak openly in groups, about what I think, what I feel [it has been difficult].

In addition to the dynamics of gender, class and race that operate in *el ambiente* there exist differences in terms of groups challenging heteronormativity. *Mayores de 30*, for example, is a group for women older than 30 years old, in which difference is established in terms of age. Other lesbian groups are built around particular political ideals, such as in the case of the lesbian-feminist group. Quetzal describes them as quite unwelcoming to bisexuals. *Opción Bi* has been active since 2003 in Mexico City (Bastida Aguilar, 2010). To my knowledge, no other group organized prior to this around bisexuality in Mexico City. The mass circulation of discourses conforming this subject position might be quite recent in Mexico City. As Quetzal describes, despite the circulation of recent discourses that celebrate sexual diversity, bisexuality is at odds with the homosexual/heterosexual binary.

### **The queer, *de ambiente*, *la diversidad sexual* and beyond it all**

In July 2010, I took part in a radio show entitled *Idea Queer*, co-animated by Paulina Martínez and Megan Gómez Peredo. The activist pair who leads the group *Musas de Metal* invited me to share some words on queer theory in their radio program. The Internet radio show was streamed from a small office located in the backyard of Paulina's

parent's. Paulina and Megan read news from around the world. They also responded to the inquiries of listeners that came via Messenger or Facebook chat. Towards the end of the show we briefly spoke of queer theory and some recommendations of books in Spanish that touched on the topic. Paulina and Megan who were both familiar with queer theory, suggested they appreciated the idea of a disembodied approach that privileged resistance to a norm. Musas de Metal works in fact with women of various non-normative sexualities. For their 16<sup>th</sup> anniversary, they communicated on their Webpage that in 16 years of work they had given workshops every three Sundays to women who are “lesbianas, bisexuales, heteroflexibles, trans, who feel queer.”<sup>37</sup> After Paulina suggested additional sources she was familiar with, she mentioned that in her perspective people rarely positioned themselves as queer in Mexico. The literal translation of “queer” into Spanish as *raro* has also been used to mark sexual dissidents in Spanish, or as Spanish philologist Ceballos Muñoz puts it as: “an identity that is impossible to classify” (2007: 165). While the terms ‘queer’ or *raro* are rarely used by people to categorize their own selves in Mexico City, I suggested at the radio show that “there are other concepts that seem to speak to the queer in Mexico City. These include the notions of *de ambiente* and *la diversidad sexual*.”

As I have discussed in my earlier research (2009), *el ambiente* is a queer milieu. As early as 1978, anthropologist Clark Taylor entitled his dissertation “El ambiente: male homosexual social life in Mexico City,” marking the common usage of the term in the 1970s. Mexican chronicler Carlos Monsiváis locates the term *el ambiente* in the 1950s

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<sup>37</sup> Accessed June 28, 2011. <http://musasdemetalgay.blogspot.com/>

(Monsiváis, 2007). Importantly, one can also label a person *de ambiente* (to be of the ambiente) suggesting that she is part of this queer environment. To be *de ambiente* is used by men, women, non-gendered conformists, etc. to signify that they are part of a world in which non-traditional notions of gender and sexuality circulate. In his oral history on gay male networks in Mexico City, historian Rodrigo Laguarda (2010) suggests that “de ambiente” was widely used in the 1970s. The term is in fact mostly known by individuals who participate in *el ambiente*. It is therefore often used as a code word in various social situations (Carrier 1995, Laguarda 2010). Lydia, for example, recalls she came into contact with the term in the early 1980s. I found the term to be less popular in 2009-2010 than in my earlier research in 2000. Throughout the interview process the term came back in the words of many women. However, when I asked women which labels they used to speak of their sexuality, very few chose the term “de ambiente.” Other code words such as *lencha* or *levis* had become more popular for women participating in *el ambiente*. At a difference with *de ambiente* that is not attached to any identity, *lencha* and *levis* are women-centric.

Another of the terms that is not focused on a particular identity, but decenters heterosexuality as the only legitimate mode to experience sexuality is *La diversidad sexual* (sexual diversity). *La diversidad sexual* does not refer to a particular subject position, but rather to the idea of sexual diversity as a notion or a term that was adopted by the LGBT movement in the 1990s. De la Dehesa (2010) suggests that the notion of “sexual diversity” became popular in Mexico reflecting the efforts of coalition building between groups of diverse sexualities. In addition, he proposes that *la diversidad sexual*

grew out of a moment in which the notion of diversity was current in the transnational repertoire of human rights. The situation in the country also influenced the appearance of the term as being used as well at the time by indigenous communities in relation to ethnic diversity (De la Dehesa, 2010: 165).

Out of the forty women I interviewed, three suggested that they did not like to categorize themselves with any labels relating to sexual identities. The three women were in their 30s. When I met Deborah ten years ago (but now 34 years old), she used to volunteer for a lesbian organization many hours per week and help women come to terms with their sexual identities. When I had the opportunity to interview her that time, Deborah claimed she identified as a lesbian. Eight years later, she found me through Facebook when she was living in New York City for a year. We renewed our friendship, catching up on our lives. Deborah had recently ended a seven year relationship with a woman before leaving Mexico City. The rupture had also involved losing her Japanese manga and comic book business she had created with her partner. She was visibly still in pain, although she reassured me that being out of Mexico had done her well. During one of our strolls in the city in search of coffee and sweets, she shared that she was now dating men and women. Two years later when we met back in Mexico City and I interviewed her, she claimed that no label reflected the ways in which she lived her sexuality. When I asked her which label, she used to describe her sexual preference, she said “Deborah”:

Pues en sí yo no me etiqueto. Digo, soy Deborah...O sea porque cuando me preguntan así, “¿Eres lesbiana?” “No, no soy lesbiana,” “¿Hetero?” “No, tampoco.” Tampoco sería bisexual. Si encontrara la persona, no

tendría porqué colocarme [la etiqueta]. Antes sí me colocaba. “Soy, lesbiana” Después dije, “Sí me atrae, un hombre. Entonces, soy bisexual, ¿No? Ya no me gustan las etiquetas. Soy Deborah.”

I do not use any labels. I say: I am Deborah. I mean, because when they ask me like: “Are you a lesbian?” “No, I’m not a lesbian.” “Hetero?” “No, I’m not”. Neither would I be bisexual. If I would find the person, I would not need [the label]. In the past I used to say: “I am a lesbian.” Later I said “If I am attracted to men, then I am bisexual, right? [but I decided] I do not like labels anymore. I am Deborah.”

Deborah claimed that she had been using her name as the best label to describe her sexual identity for the past three years. Her story challenges the immutable character of sexual identity, and presents sexuality as more fluid. The possibility of consciously not labeling oneself, as Deborah speaks of a vision where no being is entirely identical to the other, thus the challenge of labeling a collectivity with one and only label. In his work on men’s intimacy in Northern rural Mexico, anthropologist Guillermo Nuñez Noriega (2007) remarked that the heterosexual/homosexual binary rendered invisible some components of “reality.” “I am Deborah” spills out of the simple label of bisexuality, conveying greater complexity than in the logic of sexual identities and preferences. At a difference with “queer” and “de ambiente,” “Deborah” is not as clearly positioned among sexual dissidents, unless one is willing to listen to her views on gender and sexuality. Her stance nonetheless implies a critique to rigid modes of classification. It stands as a cry to elope from the narrow subject positions available in Mexico City, to make sense of sexuality.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have discussed the subject positions that have been available to women to make sense of same-sex sexuality since the 1960s until today in Mexico. I

begin by looking at the various subject positions that have been available through time to the women I interviewed. Informants suggested that women's situation has changed in Mexico in terms of waged labor, education and domestic work and gender expression. Interestingly, women of all ages suggested that there have been important changes when they compared their lives to the ones of their mothers, aunts, etc. weaving a narrative of progress. Some informants cast doubt on this idea of progress, suggesting instead that there are contradictory subject positions women may occupy in contemporary Mexico. These contradictory subject positions nonetheless remain constructed through a temporal notion where women of the "past," which are seen as more domestic and submissive, coexist with autonomous "modern" women who defy the public/private divide in contemporary Mexico. While narratives of progress should be held in skepticism, an examination of the various subject positions that have existed for women practicing female same-sex sexuality since the 1960s reveals change. Many women of older generations spoke of isolated figures that defied the norm in terms of gender and sexuality in the 1960s and 1970s. These women were not described as lesbians or homosexuals, but rather as *tortilleras*, *raritas* or *marimachas*. Silence, secrecy and the occasional dissident characterize earlier narratives. As time passes by, we see an increasing amount of "lesbians" in interviews. Younger women generally became familiar with "la lesbiana" earlier in their lives. Particularly for women who were children or teenagers in late 1990s onward, when as discussed in last chapters public debates on same-sex intimacy had filled the public sphere. This chapter defies the notion that *la lesbiana* is a universal character. Instead, discourses on women's sexuality in

Mexico City produce *la lesbiana* as a subject that “comes out of the closet,” not only in terms of her attraction to women, but also in terms of being a sexual woman. However, *la lesbiana* is however not the only subject position available to women loving women nowadays. Some women preferred the labels *bisexual*, *pansexual*, *de ambiente*, which all imply different forms of desire and relating with others. These less hegemonic labels demonstrate the rigid taxonomy that operates in Mexico nowadays, slotting individuals in the homosexual/heterosexual binary.

## Chapter 5

### “Recreating the World from our Skins”: On Intimacy, Sex, Love and Friendship

In this chapter, I examine how women who participate in queer spaces negotiate intimacy in their everyday lives, at a time in which new discourses on same-sex marriage and polyamory are circulating. In the past decade, various edited collections have been published on the anthropology of intimacy (or multidisciplinary cross-cultural perspectives on intimacy) (Bell and Coleman 1999, Hirsch and Wardlow 2006, Hatfield and Rapson 2005, Padilla, Hirsch, Muñoz-Laboy and Sember 2007, Jankowowiak 2008, Cole and Thomas 2009). In most of these publications, emotional intimacy is discussed in terms of love across cultures. This body of work questions the ways in which macro structures such as capitalism and the emergence of modernity have transformed intimacy.

During fieldwork, intimacy was often described as a personal space, which enables close kinds of connections. Under this perspective, intimacy traversed the traditional public and private divide, or its Latin American version of *la casa* (the home) or *la calle* (the street). Through this spatial metaphor, I explore a continuum of affective ties and practices that were related to intimacy in interviews, including love, sexuality and friendship. I pay particular attention to imaginaries that grew out of the 2009 marriage reform, which included same-sex couples in tension with oppositional discourses on polyamory that widely circulated in *el ambiente* at the time of fieldwork. These discussions were in fact taking place across Latin America, where same-sex marriage is increasingly accepted and reflections on polyamory are spreading in different countries. As the boundaries of love are being re-imagined, many kinds of relationships

are rethought, including friendship. Thinking of the intimate from various forms of relationships between women echoes Adrienne Rich's notion of a lesbian continuum. This continuum includes sex between women among other relationship modalities, but also non sexual interactions such as the "sharing of a rich inner life, bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support..." (Rich, 1980: 648-649). The "sharing of a rich inner life" certainly reflects some of the ways in which women thought of friendship in Mexico City. The notion of a continuum is useful since it signals the difficulties of always locking interactions into a precise kind of relationship.

Ultimately, this chapter highlights the importance of engaging with ideologies on intimacy produced by the State and other institutional actors, rather than only focusing on questions regarding identity as research on same-sex sexuality in Latin America has continuously insisted. The chapter takes Foucault's invitation formulated in *Friendship as a Way of Life*:

Another thing to distrust is the tendency to relate the question of homosexuality to the problem of "Who am I?" and "What is the secret of my desire?" Perhaps it would be better to ask oneself, "What relations, through homosexuality, can be established, invented, multiplied, and modulated?" (Foucault, 1996: 308).

This invitation strongly echoes contemporary thought on lesbian relationships in Latin America, which have been formulated through the work of the proponents of lesbian polyamory, as a way to organize intimacy. How are women taking part in *el ambiente* reconfiguring their views and practices on intimacy in the current context where new forms of organizing intimacy (i.e. same-sex marriage and polyamory) are circulating?

Which kind of intimate practices emerge in this new discursive horizon on same-sex intimacy? How are women organizing love, friendship and sexuality?

In the first part of the chapter, I discuss how informants understood the notion of intimacy in contemporary Mexico City. I then discuss how relations were generally seen to be based on trust and companionship, instead of on economic obligations as it was characteristic a few decades ago. This trend has been related to processes of globalization. However, I remark that in the context of the Reform on marriage, informants also often offered economic and rights-based arguments for marriage. In the next section, I explore oppositional discourses that challenged the idea that the only valid route for same-sex intimacy is monogamous coupling. I look at the rise and fall of polyamory between women in the 1970s, and more recent theorization on the necessity of questioning the social organization of intimacy in contemporary Mexico. The last section of this chapter explores the role of friendship in the lives of women who participated in *el ambiente*.

### **“Like a room with four walls”: Intimacy in Queer Mexico City**

In the development of his concept of “intimate citizenship,” sociologist Ken Plummer (2003: 14) proposes that there are ten “zones of intimacies.” These include: self, relationships, gender, sexuality, the family, the body, emotional life, the senses, identity and spirituality. During the interviews, I asked informants what they understood by intimacy. Interviewees rarely offered straight-forward definitions. They rather thought

aloud and in the process embraced various areas of life that related to intimacy, as Plummer does. Sexuality, friendship, emotional closeness, intimacy with one's own soul, "my space," were some of the topics typically related to intimacy. For example, in her response Mónica, 38 years old, thought of intimacy in relation to friendship and sexuality:

La intimidad me remite, en un sentido de amigo, como de estar conectado, más que un rollo sexual. Mismo en la pareja me parece que la intimidad tiene mucho que ver con la cercanía emocional que puedes tener con una persona, ¿no? A eso me remite la intimidad, a cercanía emocional, y adentro de la pareja pues sexual

Intimacy refers me, to the idea of a friend, like being connected, more than something sexual. Even in a couple it seems to me that intimacy is more related to the emotional closeness you can have with a person. Right? For me, this is what intimacy refers to, emotional closeness and in a couple, well, sexual.

When Mónica suggests that intimacy is "more than something sexual," she points to a common assumption that intimacy is related to sexuality. For this reason she must clarify that it is not only about sexuality. The term "connection" is important because sexuality and friendship here speak of connection between two or more individuals. In fact, the responses of my informants ranged from speaking of a form of connection, to a space that only pertains to the self. Luisa, 32 years old, voiced that intimacy is *conmigo misma* (with myself). While the idea of connection and personal space might appear contradictory at first glance, both ideas are in fact related. Gabriela, 25 years old, clearly bridges both perspectives:

[Intimidad] O sea espacio para mí. Por ejemplo. A veces tengo esta idea sicótica de que hay personas que pueden leer mi pensamiento. Y eso me parece una invasión tremenda a la intimidad. Si, intimidad es como darme

este espacio para mí. Este espacio que a veces puedo compartirlo con otra persona. Pero es algo, muy, muy mío, que no comparto con todo el mundo. A pesar de que soy una persona muy exhibicionista. Me gusta participar en encuestas... Si hay cosas que reservo para mí y para las personas [cercanas].

[Intimacy refers] to myself. I mean space for myself. For example, sometimes I have this psychotic idea that there are some people who can read my thoughts. This seems like a tremendous invasion of intimacy. Yes, intimacy is to give a space to myself. A space that I can share sometimes with another person, but it's something that is very, very much of my own, which I cannot share with everyone. I am very exhibitionist, I love to participate in interviews... [but] there are things that I keep to myself and very [close] people.

Although Gabriela was a very generous interviewee and talented storyteller, she makes clear that our relationship was not intimate, and that there were words she would never share with me. Gabriela depicts intimacy as a form of privileged connection. Only a few people are entitled to have access to this form of connection or to “her space.” Space was in fact a recurrent metaphor to refer to intimacy. Yvonne, 36 years old, described intimacy as a “room with four walls”:

Intimidad. Pues podría ser casi, casi como intimidad parte de la amistad... No soy tan abierta. Para que alguien pueda ya entrar a mi intimidad, es justamente que haya primero rebasado lo de la amistad, y que luego pueda pasar del otro lado. Pues no se, es algo muy importante y no ha cualquiera se le puede dar. Entonces la intimidad es algo como un cuartito de 4 paredes en el que pocos pueden entrar.

Intimacy. Well it could almost be, like intimacy as part of friendship. I am not so open. For someone to enter into ‘my intimacy’, they have to have made it to friendship first, and then to the other side. I don’t know, it’s something very important that you cannot just give to anybody. So intimacy is something like a room with four walls, which only a few can enter.

Yvonne’s account places friendship as the first step, like a border that must be crossed to “enter” intimacy. In this sense, Yvonne establishes a hierarchy of forms of affection,

where intimacy stands at the periphery. Intimacy here appears as a space that can be opened or closed. It functions as a privileged space that “you cannot just give to anybody.” It forms an almost “secret” part of the self that only a few can enter.

In sum, interviews pointed towards intimacy as personal space that might be open to others to establish a connection. Emotions, space, connection, friendship, sexuality and the self re-emerged in different ways in responses. In the following section, I juxtapose this definition of intimacy to the public/private divide, or *la casa/la calle*, to further illuminate the concept of intimacy as a close unit of the self, rather than as part of *la casa* (home), which appears as a small collectivity.

### **Intimacy and the Private and Public Divide**

In *Public Lives, Private Secrets*, historian Ann Twinam analyzes the public-private divide present in Spanish colonies across the Americas. As she points out: “language provides the first indication that colonial Spanish –American elites divided their world into private and public spheres” (Twinam, 1999: 27). The words *privado* (private) and *público* (public) were part of multiple documents. Twinam’s divide approximates contemporary feminist interventions on the public and private divide that refers to the public which takes place in politics, the workplace and other public places, as opposed to private life which is seen as occurring within the domestic realm (Sheller and Urry, 2003). However, various feminist scholars have brought our attention to the difficulties of truly disentangling the public from the private (see e.g. Gal 2002, Rooney 2002, Scott and Keates 2004). At the same time that it is questioned, the public/private

divide continues to fill the pages of feminist scholarship as it touches all areas of life. “Institutions of intimacy” (Berlant, 1997) such as marriage have traditionally been associated with the private, but as Berlant warns us “Yet the inwardness of the intimate is met by a corresponding publicness” (Berlant, 1998: 281). In contemporary Mexico the words *privado* and *público* have remained part of public life. However, early in the writing process I noticed that I rarely found *privado* in relation to intimacy. I first observed this trend when I was writing on the debates on same-sex marriage at Mexico’s Supreme Court. The word *privado* seldom appears in the hearings.

As I reviewed the responses shared by the women I interviewed, the term *privado* was only mentioned once, when I asked them to describe what the term *la intimidad* (intimacy) meant to them. Yet, there is a sense that evokes a public and private world, in the accounts I collected. My space, myself, my room are some of the expressions that capture this idea, which has had a long history in Western thought. While the terms *privado* and *público* are used at times in everyday life, it was rarely mobilized in language through interviews. After reflection and research, I noticed that the terms deployed in everyday life that allude the most to the conceptual division are *la casa* and *la calle*. Interviews are filled with references such as “*mi madre es de casa*” (my mother is of the house), “*ando en la calle*” (Literally I’m on the streets, but it means: I’m out of the house), etc. The “house” and the “street” divide, which is widely used in Latin America, embraces in many ways the general meaning of the public and private. As Warner notes about the North American case, the difference between the public and the private also implies “a hierarchy, in which the space of the market or the assembly is

given a special importance” (2002: 22). In his ethnography on queer cultures and race in Cuba, Allen describes the Latin American concept of *la calle* as “the street is more productively thought of as the public sphere, which while including the actual streets is constitutive also of state rhetorics and practices and interaction with disparate elements of the plural culture” (Allen, 2011: 22). *La casa* is more often associated with the domestic realm. Across the Americas the expression *la calle* is associated with the masculine, while *la casa*, with the feminine.

In empirical terms, *la casa* was more than often constituted of a collectivity of related kin. Often *la casa* could be associated with the block, the street, or the building where different family members lived. María Luisa, a 50 years old junior high school teacher, had her own apartment. It was located right above her mother’s apartment. Her brother and his family lived on the first floor. For a few weeks, I thought that my friend Grace, a 53 year old physician, was one of the few women I interviewed who lived in an apartment, apart from her family. One afternoon, Grace invited me and two other friends to watch a movie at her house. After the film, she invited us to her parent’s house across the street to celebrate her father’s birthday. The party was already full. We sat in the backyard around the dance floor, while happy looking people moved at the rhythm of *cumbia*. The band was composed of a keyboard player and a singer, kept asking the public for their favorite songs. Her father approached us to offer us a drink and soon enough, her sisters pushed us towards the table full of *guisos*. Later, when we returned to Grace’s house, I realized that many of the building occupants were family members who had been at the party. I learned that the pirate movie kiosk through which I went at the

entrance of her building was owned by her brother. While each of the nuclear family members had their own space, family members circulated from place to place. It is, nonetheless, important to mention that a separate apartment meant an important amount of autonomy from the family, despite the proximity. As Pauli (2008) has remarked in her research on migrant's wives in Mexico, living in a separate part of the house from in-laws built from remittances, gives a considerable degree of autonomy to these women. *La casa*, nonetheless often relates to a collectivity.

Juxtaposing the empirical dimensions of *la casa* and *lo íntimo*, it appears that *lo íntimo* is a space attached to the self, rather than a collectivity formed by *la casa*. In this sense, *lo íntimo* appears as the closest realm to the self, a virtual space with no single location in the material world, but that is manifest through various practices, emotional and bodily sensations. For the women I interviewed, the experience of *lo íntimo* did not always take place in *la casa*. Neither was it always attached to the idea of domesticity, femininity, or the family. For many interviewees, *la casa* was a realm anchored in heteronormative interactions. *Lo íntimo* might take place literally or metaphorically in *la casa* or *la calle*. *La casa/calle* traverses various intimate bonds or practices that were narrated during interviews.

The intimate, as the closest unit to the self, plays a significant role in the construction of “modern” relationships, in particular in *relaciones de pareja* (relationships between romantic partners). The fact that relationships are now envisioned as a site where different kinds of intimacy are cultivated beyond reproductive functions

opens a space in social imaginaries for same-sex relations. In the next section, I explore the basis of a relationship with *la pareja* in contemporary Mexico City.

### **The Basis of an Intimate Relationship with *la Pareja***

On a Sunday afternoon, I took part in the meeting of the group Musas de Metal, in which about 30 women participated. Attendees seemed to be aged between 20 and 60 years old, but the majority appeared to be in their 30s. A large portion of the meeting focused on the theme “Is it important for you to have a partner?” The majority of participants answered affirmatively: it was important to them. Sandra was one of the few participants who questioned the trend. For many years it was simply not important for her to have a partner. She had lived in different cities in Mexico and in other parts of the world, and she enjoyed being independent. For the past four years, she had had a partner and she enjoyed the experience, but this was the first time in her life she invested herself in love. After Sandra’s “out of the norm” intervention, we took part in a workshop activity. To participate in the game, we wrote a message on a poster. The goal was to write an appealing message that would “sell” ourselves. I must confess that I wrote a spontaneous poem on my poster. We then circulated in the room to read each other’s posters. The great majority of posters said words such as *amable* (kind), *amorosa* (loving), *honestas* (honest). We then had to vote for the most popular poster and comment on why we liked what it said. Many commented on Tania’s poster. She had written similar things than all other posters such as “kind,” but as some participants highlighted it

also included *buena cocinera* (good cook) and *empresaria* (businesswoman). Participants were not indifferent to practical qualities that tie to everyday life, such as the ones Tania wrote. However, it is no surprise that most participants tried “selling” themselves by describing personality markers that are likely to sustain love and *la confianza*. Such qualities relate to the ways in which partner relationships are now understood in Mexico.

In a *Courtship After Marriage* (2003) Jennifer Hirsch examines how the meaning of marriage has shifted within two generations in contemporary Mexico. Hirsch documents the generational contrast between marriages that used to be based on economic obligations and marriages now based on companionship, where an emphasis is put on *la confianza* (trust) rather than on *respeto* (respect). The shift to companionate marriage is in fact a global trend that has been documented in every region of the world and identified as an important value of “modernity” (Collier 1997, Inhorn 1996, Kendall 1996, Hoodfar 1997, Hirsch 2003, Hirsch and Wardlow 2006). Companionate marriage posits married relationships as based on sexual and emotional intimacy, rather than only on an economic division of labor, including reproduction.

Relationships based on *confianza* also form part of the norm in same-sex relations. Many interviewees expressed literally the desire for a relationship based on *confianza*. When I asked my friend Monse, 31 years old, what she looked for in a *pareja* (partner), she responded:

Lo que tengo. Lo que nunca creí que la verdad existía, que es la confianza, el apoyo.... O sea es una confianza que nunca la tuve con esta otra chica. Jamás se pudieron hablar de muchas cosas. Es un apoyo total, una toma de decisión de ambas, el cuidar, estar pendiente la una de la otra. El luchar

por ambas, por lo que se quiere. El que los sueños que se tengan sean compartidos, no es un sueño individual...

What I have. What I thought never existed, which is trust, support... It's the kind of trust I never had, with this other girl I was with. We were never able to talk about a lot of things. It's total support, we take decisions together, and we take care of each other. It's struggling for both, for what we want. For dreams to be shared and not individual...

At the time of the interview, Monse was enjoying her relationship with Miriam. They had met three months earlier at Cabaret Tito, a bar in Zona Rosa. Their encounter had taken place at a moment in which Monse had lost faith in relationships after a difficult separation. In her previous relationship, she had never found the *confianza* she shared with Miriam. Earlier in the interview, Monse had suggested that her previous relationship was based on "giving and receiving." She had once been in love with her ex-partner, Verónica, but Monse lamented the fact that the numerous hours they had spent on the phone talking before becoming girlfriends were short lived. Instead Verónica, whom worked as an executive assistant, drowned Monse with gifts:

Siempre fue una persona muy pretenciosa. Y mis amigas siempre me lo decían. O sea "te compro"... Todo el mundo me dijo "¿Por qué te casas? Que guey." Porque era flores diario. Cine cada dos días. Cena, tres, cuatro veces fuera. "Te voy a regalar el coche, te voy a regalar esto..." Siempre fue mucho en cuestión de te doy, te doy, te doy.

She was always very pretentious and my friends would tell me: "She bought you." Everyone would ask "Why are you getting married? How stupid." Because it was flowers every day, movie-theatre every two days. Dinner out three or four times per week. "I'll buy you a car, I'll give you this, I'll give you that..." It was always about, I'll give you, I'll give you, I'll give you.

The constant material flow of objects felt like an empty sickness after a few years and Monse decided to leave the house that they shared and end the relationship with

Verónica. Instead at the moment of the interview, Monse and Miriam lived at Monse's parent's house at the center of the city near Sonora market. They lived in a part of the house that was separated from the rest of the house by a small courtyard. They had access to a bedroom, a living room and a guest bedroom. Monse had lived in an apartment a few months before, which she shared with a gay male friend. She went back to her parents' house at the request of her other siblings, in order to help taking care of her aging parents, and in particular her mother who could not walk anymore. Her siblings had children, and had argued that Monse should then take care of her parents. When I asked Monse how her father felt about having her and her girlfriend home, she said that he loved it because they could both help at home, cooking and cleaning the house. Monse and Miriam were perceived as being helpful at home. Shortly after they moved in, the couple started a prepared meal business. They sold meals to merchants of the Sonora market and to families who lived nearby. Monse cooked the meals and helped at home, while Miriam ran around the market to take orders and deliver meals. Their business covered their expenses and some expenses of the household. Although her economic necessities were more than covered when she lived with Verónica, Monse felt uneasy in that position. She was more comfortable working and sharing household responsibilities with Miriam.

*La confianza* was not always easily found. The fact that Monse signals she first thought it did not exist suggests that she put into doubt this ideal. Another ideal that was often put into doubt to sustain a relationship, and that Monse does not mention, was the one of love. As Mónica, 38 years of age shares:

O sea, yo pensaba en los 20s que lo que quería en una pareja era amor, pero ahora a mis casi cuarenta me doy cuenta que con el amor no basta. ¿no? En los treinta pensaba que tener una pareja y que el amor era construir juntas y que uno puede decidir enamorarse de alguien y luchar por una relación, pero tampoco es eso porque si no hay química no hay relación. Entonces, la química no basta, el amor no basta, el querer no basta, entonces ya no sé qué basta para una relación, supongo que la suma de las partes... Creo que en el momento busco una pareja, química, comprensión, sexo, este amor, entrega, co-responsabilidad, pues estar en el camino correcto...

In my 20s I thought that what I wanted in a relationship was love, but now that I'm almost in my 40s I realize that love is not enough. Right? When I was in my 30s, I thought that having a partner meant building together [a relationship] and that you can decide to fall in love with someone and to fight for the relationship. But that is not the answer because if there is no chemistry, there is no relationship. So chemistry is not enough, love is not enough, to want it is not enough, so I do not know what is enough. I suppose that the sum of the three parts. I think that right now I am looking for a partner, chemistry, understanding, sex, love, giving oneself, co-responsibility, to be on the right path...

In this excerpt Mónica signals the fact that what she wants in a relationship has changed. Although she looks for love, two decades of lived experience have taught her that love is not enough to sustain a relationship. Neither is the will to have a relationship, which in Mónica's perspective needs some magic (or chemistry) that is not present just with anyone. Instead, she suggests that there are multiple ingredients on which to base a relationship. Most of these ingredients relate to emotions, sexuality and energy. A sixth sense is required to judge if one is on the right path, despite the appearance that most of these ingredients might be present. Mónica's doubts about what it takes to sustain a relationship were largely contingent upon the fact that at that moment she was ending a ten year long relationship. In fact, at the time of the interview, the couple was in the process of moving Celia's things out of the apartment they had shared together. I recall Celia and Mónica's commitment ceremony about five years earlier, after the couple had

just moved in. Mónica was in fact one of the few informants whom had celebrated an informal ceremony with a long term partner. I next discuss why women decided to “marry.”

### **The Reasons for Marriage**

On a Saturday morning I went to interview Clara at her home in *colonia* Ampliación Piloto, situated in the Western edges of Mexico City. Clara, 31 years old, lived with her partner Karina a few houses down the street from Clara’s mother. Clara owned a local pastry shop with her family, while Karina took care of some of the administrative aspects of the business. She also worked as a lawyer on some cases with a colleague. When I arrived I was surprised to find Clara with her partner Karina and two of their best friends sitting in the living room. They were all ready to take part in the interview. The event turned more into a talk show, rather than a traditional interview. While Clara answered most of the questions, Karina would jump in from time to time to correct her partner. Their friend Brenda, who had known Clara since childhood, laughed recalling how Clara and she used to flirt with girls since elementary school, through *cartitas* (little letters or notes).

My friend Astrid, who also lived in the same part of the city, had recommended I interview Clara because she had celebrated a union (*Sociedades de Convivencia*). While many informants had organized their own commitment celebrations, Clara was the only

interviewee whom had contracted a formal civil union or a marriage. This is not surprising considering that in 2008, a year before I started fieldwork, 308 couples had celebrated *Sociedades de Convivencia* across the whole city (Robles, 2008). The Reform on marriage took place in 2010 and none of my informants had rushed to city authorities to make their relationships official in legal terms.

When I asked why they decided to marry, Clara jokingly said “*es que la quería amarrar/ I wanted to tie her up.*” Her words implied that she did not want Karina to leave. Unsatisfied with her partner’s response, Karina jumped in half a second later:

Es ser congruente con los mismos derechos que uno va peleando. No podemos decir a pues, esta ahí esta la ley y no ejercerla. Bueno somos una pareja, que de verdad queremos ser una pareja para generar una familia... Aparte por la cuestión de la seguridad. Yo trabajo, ella trabaja. Se generan bienes. Cuando no había ese tipo de protección para nuestro ambiente, era que... llegaba la familia del que ya se había muerto, y dejaba sin calzones a la otra persona... Estamos tan enamoradas, que llega este momento de decir: ¿porqué si los heterosexuales tienen una forma de manifestar ese amor ante la sociedad, porqué nosotras no? Entonces, igual lo hicimos. Fiesta y todo el rollo. Todo eso, sí.

We have to be consistent with the rights that you fight for. We cannot say, oh the law is there and not exercise it. Well we are a couple, who truly wants to be a couple to make a family... and because of security issues. I work and she works. We have things. When there was not this kind of protection for our *ambiente*... the family of the one who died would arrive and leave the other without anything, not even a pair of underwear... We are so in love that comes the moment to say: If heterosexuals have a way to manifest their love before society, why don’t we? So we did it. A party and the whole thing. All of it.

Karina’s training as a lawyer at first leaks into her response. She provides three reasons for marriage: exercising your rights, insuring economic security and demonstrating this shared love to society. For years same-sex couple relationships had rested on

companionship. The main reason to take part in a commitment ceremony a few years ago would have been along the lines of the third reason. Nonetheless, given the legal shift, some women I met through fieldwork were considering a union or marriage for reasons that had to do little with love. As activist Lolkin Castañeda shared with me, some get married to protect their patrimony. While economic reasons might become central, they do not form the basis of a relationship as in the past, where the gendered division of labor would insure the survival of the family. Nonetheless, economic rational arguments often formed part of the motives for getting married.

At the time of fieldwork, certain activists were questioning the idea that the only way to organize same-sex intimacy, including love and sexuality, was through *la pareja*. Next, I explore some of the voices that circulated on polyamory in Latin America, right at the moment in which the same-sex monogamous couple had been legitimated by the State through the reform on marriage in the Federal District. I first look at discourses on polyamory through a collection of writings called *Desobedientes* (Disobedient). Later, I look at the rise and disappearing of an earlier “wave” of polyamorous practices between women in Mexico in the 1970s. The last part of my discussion on polyamory returns to the present to examine what interviewees thought of polyamory in 2009-2010. Polyamorous practices might have existed throughout time in Mexico, but ultimately contrasting past and contemporary “waves” of such practices, one needs to ask when do practices remain practices and when (and why) is there a need to theorize such practices, as the authors of *Desobedientes* do.

### **Polyamory and New Homonormative Trends**

In October 2009, I attended the book launch of *Desobedientes: Experiencias y reflexiones sobre poliamor, relaciones abiertas y sexo casual entre lesbianas latinoamericanas* (*Disobedient: Experiences and reflections on polyamory, open relationships and casual sex among latin american lesbians*), a collection of essays, poems and short stories on polyamory, open relationships and casual sex between women edited by Latin American lesbian feminists. The reading took place at a bookstore Voces en Tinta, located in Mexico's City neighborhood La Zona Rosa, which is predominantly associated with LGBT entertainment establishments. The bookstore specializes in gender studies and offers many titles relating to LGBTQI studies. These talented writers, as many other individuals, questioned the teleology of amorous relationships that lead to marriage and the family, as well as the social and the cultural norms, which in their most conservative expression align women's sexuality with procreation. Polyamorous practices pose an important challenge to the norms of double morality that are still important in 2009, as I discussed in Chapter 4. However, the polyamorous proposal that was deemed as transgressive by many women in queer spaces and in larger society did not only challenge in 2009-2010 the norms of double morality. It is no surprise that such reflection would grow at a moment in which debates on same-sex partnerships and marriage circulated in the public sphere.

In 2009, Mexico City became the first city in Latin America to legalize same-sex marriage. A decade of discussions on same-sex partnerships preceded the reform on marriage in the Federal District. A few months later in Argentina, the Senate accepted the

modifications to the Civil Code, which permits marriage between all genders. Colombia, Uruguay, and Paraguay have also carried out debates around the possibility of having a law similar to Argentina's in their respective countries. In 2011, same-sex marriage was approved in Brazil. The debates surrounding these laws highlight how in Mexico, and in other parts of Latin America, societies are engaged in reflections on the legitimacy of particular relationships. If same-sex marriage activists challenged compulsory heterosexuality, polyamorous collectives also questioned compulsive coupling and monogamy and its related systems of property, kinship and inheritance. The polyamorous proposal contested not only double morality, but also what Duggan (2003: 50) has termed *homonormativity*.

In this new context, expectations on queer life narratives were changing. On a Friday evening my friend Nadia visited me, at the studio apartment I was renting. In our conversation, she told me about the ten weddings she had witnessed that week, for work since she collaborated with activists whom promoted the reform on marriage. She also told me that earlier, she had been talking with her friend Rogelio. He had commented that the good thing about being gay was the fact that people would not ask you "and you, why aren't you married?" But recently, someone had asked Rogelio "Hey, you are 30 years old, aren't you going to get married, now that there is gay marriage?" "*Los gays nos salvamos de eso, pero ahora ya no/As gays, we were safe from this, but this is no longer true,*" she said. Nadia's words signaled to the possibility of aligning queer lives with reproductive time through hegemonic discourses. In a *Queer Time and Place*, Halberstam affirms that "queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their

participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience—namely, birth, marriage, reproduction and death” (2005: 2). The disorganization of bodies in time and space challenge some of the modes of subjectification, the control of individuals and more broadly populations. At the time of fieldwork this was certainly in part true, in discourse created by the lesbian polyamorous movement. However, narratives on queer marriage and reproduction being part of queer lives were certainly circulating as well. In many ways, “birth, marriage, reproduction and death” formed part of the ideal course of love and life in the lives of many of my informants.

Polyamory as defined in *Desobedientes* had the potential to challenge these ideal courses of life, the hierarchy of intimate relationships and the ways in which we understand love, sexuality and affection. While the collection resists providing one single definition of polyamory, Espinosa Miñoso suggests that “ *poliamor, relaciones abiertas, amor libre, sexo casual son todas diferentes maneras con las que a través de los tiempos se ha nombrado la experiencia de la multiplicidad del encuentro, el deseo, el relacionamiento amoroso, la sexualidad y el erotismo entre personas humanas, por fuera de la normatividad social de la monogamia/* polyamory, open relationships, free love and casual sex have been different ways to name the multiple ways of encountering desire, loving relationships, sexuality and eroticism between human beings , out of the social norms of monogamy” (2009: 6). Espinosa Miñoso’s words point to different feelings and practices that relate to love, relationships and sex between human beings. Importantly, at

the heart of her definition is the fact that these practices take place out of the norms of monogamy.

Mexican philosopher Neri Arriaga defines polyamory as follow: *“la práctica o la posibilidad de establecer relaciones íntimas, amorosas, sexuales (no necesariamente) estables con más de una persona, en un plan de equidad, mutuo acuerdo y honestidad entre las partes/* the practice or the possibility of establishing intimate, loving, sexual relations (not necessarily) stable with more than one person, envisioning equity, consent and honesty between the people involved” (2009: 14). This definition also highlights the challenge to monogamy. Neri Arriaga’s definition privileges “sexual relations.” The definition tends to be prescriptive, to the effect that it attaches polyamorous practices to “equity, consent and honesty.” As Petrella (2007) identifies in her research on North American polyamorous self-help books, by prescribing particular ethical practices, these texts become counteractive to their revolutionary potential. They ultimately regulate conduct, foreclosing people’s creative potential in terms of possible relationships.

In a passage, Pessah defines polyamory as loving many things at the same time, beyond the love for a person: *“El hecho de poder pasar horas escribiendo, o leyendo lo que fuere que no comparto con Clarisse, inclusive viajes de un mes sin ella, para mí, es un placer muy trabajado...Eso es el poliamor, diversidad de amores, no únicamente a las mujeres/to be able to spend hours writing, or reading whatever I don’t share with Clarisse, or even taking a month long trip by myself, is a pleasure I have cultivated... that’s polyamory, a diversity of loves, not only for women”* (2009: 26). In this quote that

puts “love” at its center, the practice of sex is not implicated. Instead we find love for other kinds of practices such as reading or writing.

As I discuss later, polyamory challenged the “desiring path,” or most common trajectories of coupling that are traced in *el ambiente*. In the following sections I review some of the contributions of *Desobedientes* as it provides a vision on proposals that polyamorous collectives are making at the moment in Latin America. It is important to state that these discourse principally circulated in lesbian circles in Mexico City at the moment of fieldwork. This was not a proposal that emerged in the LGBT community as a whole. Perhaps practices took place in *el ambiente* at large, but the need to theorize these practices in late 2000 came from lesbian and bisexual women.

*Polyamory as an Open Possibility in “Desobedientes”*

At a time where same-sex committed relations were being legitimated by the State, polyamorous collectives brought to our attention the possibility for women to organize intimacy differently. While some of the strategies to bring in a different intimate order were discursive (workshops, books, etc.), the heart of the strategy resides in these alternative embodied practices that are not always fully legitimated in the lesbian world or in larger society. It rests on series of disorganized actions that question the norm. Actions are in large part unplanned, as *Desobedientes* also emerges as a reflection on the apparent spontaneity and disorganization of desire. As Espinosa Miñoso says: “*ninguna comunidad humana ha podido nunca deshacerse totalmente del fantasma de un deseo que se resiste a su regulación/ no human community has been able to completely get rid of the ghost of a desire, which resists regulation*” (2009: 7). *Desobedientes* indirectly

presents the strategy as an open question that has no single answer. In the words of Neri Arriaga “*Soló probabilidades, alternativas/There only exist probabilities, alternatives*” (2009: 13). Precisely, the strategy attacks the single route of compulsive coupling and reproduction, while suggesting that there are as many answers as people on how to live affective relationships. The strategy is lived as a long lasting experiment.

The authors also question what it means to open themselves to polyamory as women, in societies in which the ideals on sexuality prescribe in their most traditional expression reproductive sexuality to women. Throughout the chapters contributors question compulsory coupling, partners as private property and the myth of ever after, but we also read about the everyday life of an open long distance relationship, an orgy, painful internal dialogues, jealousy, solidarity, complicity and long discussions on how to keep a relationship. The editors situate in fact the point of departure of the anthology in a moment of crisis, after two of the editors confessed to their respective partners that they had sustained a relationship with another person. In time the crisis passed but the idea of reflecting on polyamory and casual sex emerged.

For the most part, *Desobedientes* does not promise that polyamory will lead to a utopian world. Nor does it suggest that the execution of its tactics is without difficulties. It is a strategy of hope and disenchantment all at once. From the very beginning, in the introduction Espinosa Miñoso states: “*es cierto, que el camino no está lleno de rosas, no es ciertamente el camino más fácil el de las relaciones abiertas, pero el reto está ahí para todas/ it is true that the path is not full of roses, the path of open relationships is certainly not the easiest one, but the challenge is there for all of us. After all the path of*

lesbianism has not been easy and yet I have found satisfactions in it” (2009: 8). In brief, polyamorous strategies might be characterized as probabilities and alternatives that do not necessarily promise a better world, an experiment in the making that begs no answers. In the following section, I explore how the polyamorous proposal appeared as a *déjà vu* for some informants who claimed a previous polyamorous “wave” had taken place in the 1970s.

*“Recreating the World from our Skins”: Polyamorous Pasts*

On October 2011, I presented an earlier version of some of the previous sections on polyamory at a conference at Barnard College. In the question/answer period one of the attendants mentioned with a huge grin that polyamory had existed way before the writing of *Desobedientes* in Mexico. Listening to this comment, I recalled the day I interviewed Ellrolloes, a 50 years old stage director, at the ecological park of Los Viveros de Coyoacán. While we walked through the beautiful pine tree forest, Elrolloes recalled her participation in el ambiente in the late 1970s, when she was about 17 years old. While I have no doubts that sexual norms change over time and space, her narrative leads me to approach the narrative of progress with caution. As she says:

Ahora que me hablan de queer y del poliamor, yo ya lo viví eso... En casa de Nancy Cárdenas, un día habíamos en un congreso 200 mujeres. Y habíamos no sé cuantas en pelotas ahí en la alberca. Y después tuvimos rollos sexuales. Que no sabías ni cómo se llamaba la sutana ni nada. Y era así como una droga, ¿no? Sexual... pero era también como una necesidad de experimentar y de romper, como esta cuestión de normas. De juicios, como mujeres, que veníamos cargando.

Now that people are talking about ‘queer’ and polyamory, I already I did live that... At Nancy Cárdenas’ house, there were 200 women at a

conference and there were many naked in the swimming pool. And we did sexual stuff where you did not know what was the name of whomever or anything. It was like a drug, right? Sexual... but also like the need to experiment and break with some norms. Prejudices that we were carrying as women.

Elrolloes recalls her days during what she labels later in the interview as the “sexual revolution.” She describes a brief event of this embodied revolution that took place at Nancy Cárdenas’ house, whom was the first open lesbian activist who appeared on national television in 1973 in Mexico. Although Elrolloes came from a working-class family, her job at the university library permitted her to interact with university students and professors who formed the basis of the homosexual liberation movement in the 1970s. In Mexico, the movement largely grew from the 1968 student movement which was protesting against the authoritarian administration of Díaz Ordaz and the use of public resources for the 1968 Olympic Games. These pioneers had connections with the radical left in Mexico and emerging guerrilla movements. Through the words of Elrolloes, the body, sensations and feelings were central resources at the heart of revolutionary politics. Addictive bodily sensations went beyond their mere intensity. They functioned as a liberating tool that questioned norms. In this case, the norms that were challenged related to traditional ideals of female sexuality in Mexico and the idea of biology as destiny. As most of the women over 50 years old commented in interviews, their families and communities expected them to hold a career as secretaries, teachers and nurses; they were also expected to marry and have children.

By challenging reproductive sexuality, women also challenged hegemonic discourses on love that circulated and were highly gendered. María Luisa, a middle

school teacher, who was also in her 50s in 2009, remembers one of the concepts of love she learned growing up at home:

Si claro. Por supuesto. El amor romántico. Ese amor que todo lo da. Todo lo sacrifica. Ese concepto, tan grave para nosotras. Sí, sí, me lo inculcaron, de telenovelas, de novelas rosas. Todo eso. Era lo que se esperaba de mí. Que yo, quisiera un hombre tanto, tanto, qué dejará de ser yo misma, y no tuviera deseos. Qué no tuviera otro camino más que servirlo, atenderlo, cuidarlo. Ja,ja. Tener hijitos y así seguir toda mi vida hasta morirme. Trabajando y haciendo cosas por el supuesto hombre que yo amara. Ese amor sacrificado. Es el único concepto que me inculcaron.

Yes, of course. Romantic love. This love that gives it all. That sacrifices everything. This concept that is so wrong for us, women. Yes, yes, that's what I was taught, [this love from] *telenovelas*, romance novels. All of that. It is what was expected from me. That I would love a man so much that I would stop being myself, and having desires. That I would not have any other path than to serve him, take care of him. Ha, ha. To have children and continue this way until the end of my life, until I died. Working and doing things for the hypothetical man I would love. This love of sacrifice. It is the only concept I was taught.

María Luisa's words closely echo Stevens' contested 70s concept of *Maríanismo*, a concept constructed to correspond to machismo that suggests that women are perceived to be semi-divine through their moral superiority, spiritual strength leading to a large capacity for humility and sacrifice (Stevens, 1973: 94). Nonetheless, María Luisa's words situate sacrifice within the confines of love. In the name of love, women will sacrifice everything and lose their individual identities. For women in the 1970s, and early 80s, lesbianism and experimenting with sexuality challenged the hegemonic ideal of sacrificial love that was bound to marriage as a destiny for women.

Reflecting on the words of Elrolloes, I told her that I did not doubt that similar situations took place between women today, but I had not heard of any similar story involving

women in contemporary Mexico City. “Are these different times for experimenting? Have these practices vanished?” I asked.

E: Entra en ese momento, cuando nosotras estábamos en la neta del planeta de la revolución sexual... entra... el SIDA... Teníamos un miedo de haber sido contagiados... ya no podíamos ejercer esta sexualidad, tan libre, tan abierta. Y después viene el golpe al Sex-pol, cuando viene el golpe a la izquierda. Fue como simultáneo. El desaparecer de la izquierda en México, mediante la fusión de los partidos... Y fue adiós matices, como un piso parejo, cuyo único objetivo es electoral. Entonces, yo sí lo considero un error... Y que eso fue lo que acabó también con ese discurso. Por eso ahora la marcha es un gran carnaval... No ser capaces de reivindicarnos... como un movimiento de oposición... Ahora yo sé que la mayoría de mis cuatas, son muy promiscuas, son muy infieles, pero no son honestas, y no lo dicen, que es distinto.

A: No tanto en el rollo del poliamor, que dice de ser abiertas...

E: Exacto. Y ahí estábamos elaborando un discurso... El replantearse a partir de la piel. Emocional y socialmente.

E: At that time, when we were right at the heart of the sexual revolution... AIDS appeared. We were so afraid to have been infected... We could not practice anymore this open sexuality, so free, so open. And after that the “Sex-pol” was hit after the coup to the left. It was like simultaneous. The disappearing of the left in Mexico, through the fusion of political parties. And it was like goodbye nuances, like a flat floor, whose only objective was to get elected. I consider it was a mistake. And it ended with this discourse. This is why pride parades today are like a big carnival. For not being able to cultivate ourselves... as an oppositional movement... Now, I know that the majority of my friends are very promiscuous and very unfaithful, but they are not honest [about it] and they don’t say it, which is very different.

A: You mean, not really like in poliamory that suggests that it should be open...

E: Exactly. And there, we were elaborating a discourse... recreating the world from our skin. Emotionally and socially.

According to Elrolloes, AIDS and the disappearing of the radical left in Mexico, changed sexual discourses and practices for men and women who were taking part in the sexual

revolution. Although lesbian groups such as Lesvoz and Oikabeth emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s, many of the groups such as Grupo Lambda of the homosexual liberation movement were composed of men and women. AIDS in the early 1980s affected more directly men than women, but according to Elrolloes the participation in activism with gay men transformed women's sexual practices in the era of AIDS as well. In *Un amor que se atrevió a decir su nombre (A Love that Dared to Say its Name)* (2000) Norma Mogrovejo suggests that in the mid-1980s lesbian activists also largely left the homosexual movement, rejecting the masculine symbolic order and embracing the demands of the feminist movement. In this sense, lesbian history and gay history took to separate paths from this moment onward. As Elrolloes suggests, the dissolution of the radical left meant a change in embodied practices and discourses as well.

In the 1970s and early 80s, polyamory was a practice that challenged the norms of femininity, in particular the hegemonic ideals on female sexuality and sacrificial love. Because of AIDS, the dissolution of the radical left, sexual discourses and practices were greatly transformed. In the following section, I discuss what polyamory meant in 2009-2010 for women I interviewed.

### **Contemporary Reflections on Polyamory**

At the time of fieldwork in Mexico City in 2009-2010, discussions on polyamory were growing in lesbian spaces. In order to raise consciousness on this alternative mode of relating, activists put together collections of writing such as *Desobedientes*.

Organizations such as *Colectivo Poliamor* presented workshops at lesbian and queer organizations and some of my friends initiated discussions on-line through social media such as *Facebook*. These strategies promoted reflection on an issue that had been at times demonized in lesbian communities. This was particularly true in a context where discourses on double morality classify women as good/bad according to their sexual behavior.

During fieldwork in 2009-2010 and in interviews, informants provided their opinions on new narratives on polyamory that were circulating in queer spaces. However, very few practices involving polyamory (as discussed in *Desobedientes*) were described to me. Selene, a 24 years old student in history at the National University, shared during the interview her views on polyamory:

Yo considero que soy amorosa, que amo muchas personas a la vez. En este momento, amo a mis amigas, amo a mi mamá, amo a mi papá, a mis hermanos, a mi abuelita, a mi sobrino... Y en ese sentido, es un tanto el poliamor. Es este, lo llevamos a cabo aunque no lo sepamos. En cuanto a destinarme sexualmente... yo lo he hablado con Diana... Le costaría trabajo, pero ella está abierta a que yo experimente con otras personas. Y es algo que igual a mí me da miedo que no puedo hacer nada más así.

I do consider that I am loving, that I love many people at the same time. Right now, I love my friends, I love my mother, I love my father, my brothers, my grandmother, my nephew... and this is in a way polyamory, like we practice it without even knowing about it... In sexual terms, I have talked about it with Diana... It would be hard for her, but she is open to the idea of me experimenting with other people. And its something that really scares me that I cannot just do like this.

In this quote, Selene first clarifies her definition of polyamory, which involves the term love beyond the confines of romantic love and/or sexual bonds. Discussions on polyamory had split open the meaning of love to question romantic love but also

friendship, familial love and other forms of affection. Nevertheless, Selene is aware that certain ways of defining polyamory relate it often to the sexual domain. In this sense she signals towards an agreement she has with her girlfriend Diana. In stating that “it’s something that really scares me,” Selene suggests the difficulties of transgressing established boundaries. In the words of philosopher Neri Arriaga (2009: 13), in polyamory “there only exist probabilities, alternatives.” Selene finds herself facing uncertainty, with the possibility of taking a path for which there is no clear blueprint.

As in this case, most concrete stories around polyamorous experimentation I encountered during fieldwork involved hypothetically open relationships. As Elrolloes describes earlier, I did find many narratives on unfaithful relations, jealousy and dramatic endings. These included women recalling their “mistakes” as much as informants who spoke of their lover’s betrayals. However, found few explicit agreements that questioned the path of serial monogamy, which was the most common modality of relationship I encountered.

Some of the interviewees had their doubts about the polyamorous proposal. Mónica, 38 years old, claimed that she had never been entirely monogamous, except in her last relationship, which lasted for ten years. In her previous relationships she had had lovers from time to time. This had not been mutually decided with her partners, whom did not always know about her lovers. Her partners and lovers also often had other relationships she would “discover.” Her opinion on polyamory came in part from the years she spent in non-monogamous relationships. As she explains:

No sé, yo tengo mis reservas acerca del poliamor porque el estar involucrada con por lo menos más de tres personas, me parece que es un poco complicado. No en términos físicos, eso es lo de menos. Por lo demás...es un poco complicado poder establecer un afecto con tantas personas, ¿no? Si con una es difícil. Si, el poder llegar a la intimidad con alguien y conocer alguien, en años... pues con muchas creo que ha de ser algo extenuante incluso...

I don't know. I am not convinced by polyamory because to be involved with more than three people seems a bit complicated. Not in physical terms, that is really the least. Because of other things...it is a little bit complicated to establish affection with that many people. Right? If it is difficult with one. If to be able to be intimate with someone and getting to know them takes years...well with many it must be even a bit exhausting...

At first, Mónica's doubts about the polyamorous proposal are difficult to grasp, as she suggests that it must be complicated to be involved with more than three people at the same time. Two people would be sufficient, to refer to a relationship as polyamorous. The challenge is not about relating sexually with many people, but about sharing affection and overall getting to know them well. At some level, Mónica is suggesting that sex or relationships that would remain on the surface might be possible, but it would be very difficult to know more than one person deeply. Mónica's assertion echoes the ideal of companionate relationships, which has become the dominant model today in Mexico. Her words suggest that it might be challenging to develop companionship with more than one person. Mónica does not condemn polyamory, but she has serious doubts about its impact on relationship ideals.

Some informants strongly disagreed with polyamorous forms of organizing intimacy. Alicia, a 65 year-old physician, had maintained a relationship with her partner for the past 30 years. When I interviewed her at her office, which was decorated with

anatomical medical prints, plants and bookshelves, Alicia commented on films with lesbian characters. She had acquired most of them through a friend who sold lesbian films on DVD, at lesbian support groups. Most of these films had been produced out of Mexico and predominantly came from Europe and the United States. As she says:

Pero a nivel cultural a mí me parece que esas relaciones “hoy termino con esa pareja y dentro de 8 días me voy a acostar con otra” o “ahora voy a llevar a mi pareja de turno y se va a quedar a dormir aquí, y después de 3 días ya salgo del cuarto mareada por haber estado con esta gente, y salgo contando, y nadie me tiene que decirme nada”. No. Eso a mí no me dice nada.

At the cultural level it seems to me that relationships [that are like] “today I end with this partner and in 8 days I will sleep with another one” or “now, I will bring this girl, and she will sleep at my house, and after 3 days I come out of the room dizzy for having been with those people, and I tell everyone, and no one can say anything. No. That does not seem ok.

While Alicia does not comment directly on polyamory, it is clear that she does not support casual sex, or serial fast pace dating involving sexual relations. During the interview, she attributed this behavior to US American culture. However, a few weeks before when I asked her if I could interview her, when we were at lunch with the lesbian group Mayores de 30, Alicia also made clear on that occasion that she disapproved of “irresponsible youth who just party and run around with girls.” She wanted to make sure I was not that kind of person. She carefully studied me over lunch and offered me a ride to a subway station, which gave us some more time to chat. A few weeks later, after I gained her approval, I asked Alicia, if she had noticed a difference in young women’s relationships when she attended lesbian groups, from her relationship. She stated the following:

Definitivamente. Totalmente... Que me molesta las actitudes de jóvenes, son el no tener suficiente paciencia para escuchar al otro. Hay poca escucha. Hay mucho ruido. Hay ausencia de diálogo. Hay muy poco compromiso hacia una relación, llámese de amistad, de compañerismo, de pareja, de lo que sea. Los muy jóvenes para mi están muy inmersos en sí mismos, en relación con su máquina computadora, que ellos, o ellas

Certainly. Totally... It really bothers me, the attitudes of young people who do not have enough patience for listening to each other. There is no listening. There is a lot of noise. There is no dialogue. There is very little commitment towards relationships ...friendship, companionship, a partner, whatever it is. The youngest ones are very immersed in themselves, in a relationship with their computers, instead of with each other.

Alicia attributed the endurance of her 30 year relationship to being able to listen to each other. Alicia and her partner did not live together. In this sense, their relationship challenged the representation of the monogamous couple co-habitation. Alicia told me that at some point she had considered living with her partner and children, but now she was too used living apart from her. Instead she shared a house with her younger sister. Living with the family was a pattern that was not uncommon among women I interviewed, as noted earlier on. For most of her life, Alicia had lived her relationship out of the sites of *el ambiente*. She had not been part in any way of the homosexual liberation movement, in which some of the women I interviewed, ten to fifteen years old younger than Alicia had taken part in, or the bar scene of *el ambiente*. In fact, the first lesbian site she visited was the lesbian feminist organization El Clóset de Sor Juana, in the late 1990s. This was about 25 years after her first relationship with a woman, when she lived in a convent. Alicia had not been part of the first sexual revolution narrated by Elrolloes and had no interest in the proposals of the second polyamorous wave. Neither did she

have an interest in marrying her partner. Time had passed and she had her own life and own habits, she said. Overtime she had developed her own agreements with her partner.

In this sense, some interviewees shared that many relationships escape the available modes of representation. Selene made clear that every relationship was unique. Each one was constituted by a particular set of agreements. Here, thinking of monogamy as opposed to polyamory was unproductive to represent the complex singularity of every kind of relationship. As Selene expresses:

Creo que todas las relaciones...Independientemente de la categoría que le pongamos, de noviazgo, de amistad...son únicas. Y aunque tengas diez amigos, cada amigo es único, y tu forma de relacionarte con esa persona es única... Porque son personas al fin de cuentas. Y empiezas a crear consensos y empiezas a crear tratos. Y fidelidades también. Así como existe fidelidad sexual hacía una persona, existe fidelidad hacía otras cosas. En ese sentido creo que hay tratos y fidelidades que hay que cumplir con todas las personas...

I think that all relationships... independently of their category, in dating or in friendship, are unique. Even if you have ten friends, every friend is unique, and your form of relating with this person is unique...Because in the end, they are people. And you begin to create consensus and agreements, and faithfulness. In the same way than people are faithful in sex there are other kinds of faithfulnesses towards other things... In this sense I think that there are agreements that you have to honor with any person...

In the words of Alicia and Selene, relationships were relationships, whether they involved a friend, a girlfriend or a partner. All of them involved some kind of basic agreement. However, most people would agree that although each relationship is unique, there were differences between these various kinds of relations. In the following section, I look at the meaning of friendship in *el ambiente*.

### **On the Role of Queer Friendships**

Friendship was commonly described to be connected to intimacy. The recurrent association to this theme might be related to a methodological question since one of the discussions that preceded the question of intimacy in the questionnaire was related to friendship. Nonetheless, if there was no association whatsoever between these issues, informants would not have used it as a category to speak of intimate relations. Ethnographers have given little attention to friendship in social life. Anthropology tends to understand the organization of societies principally through kinship or other forms of associations linked to territories, politics or ethnic affiliations. As Bell and Coleman state: “Analyses of the processual, the idiosyncratic, the affective and the non-public aspects of social relations- all elements of at least some models of friendship- have often been far less evident” (1999: 4). When thinking of polyamory in the sense of many kinds of love, friendship is an intimate way of relating that often remains beneath State policing. It does not intend to reproduce life or the traditional family. Yet it is grounded on this intimate space that is constantly mobilized in “modern” relationships. A focus on friendship also has the potential to complicate the ways in which queer spaces are imagined as prominently sexual and homosexual.

Throughout fieldwork, I visited places of *el ambiente* with friends. For example, we went out to celebrate their birthdays or simply with no further intention than spending time together. Throughout the years, the kind of love I have most often found in *el ambiente* is the one mobilized through friendship. Some of these relationships have lasted for over ten years, others have been formed more recently. Some have involved getting to

know our lives inside out, others a few talks and the love for a shared activity such running together at *Los Viveros de Coyoacán* a few mornings a week. In this section, I explore the possibilities of female friendship in *el ambiente*, in a context where friendship are largely thought as masculine. I mainly center discussion on the role of queer friendships. How they constitute a network of relations in which heterocentric perspectives are decentered and in some cases prove to be vital. Finally, through this focus on friendship, I question the boundaries between the various kinds of affective expressions and the relationship of friendship, erotic and romantic relationships.

### *The Gender of Friendship*

In a *Friendship as a Way of Life*, Foucault points to friendship as a mode to contest power in queer life. He suggests that in Europe in the 1980s, there is no model for men to share life together, as he says:

As far back as I remember, to want guys [garçons] was to want relations with guys. That has always been important for me, not necessarily in the form of a couple but as a matter of existence: how is it possible for men to be together? To live together, to share their time, their meals, their room, their leisure, their grief, their knowledge, their confidences? What is it to be “naked” among men, outside of institutional relations, family, profession, and obligatory camaraderie? It’s a desire, an uneasiness, a desire-in-uneasiness that exists among a lot of people.

Although the statement was formulated in a different context, Foucault’s words are a useful point of departure to discuss friendship in the lives of women in Mexico City’s *ambiente*. As Lumsden (1991) noted a two decades ago, men spending a lot of time together has not been regarded as suspicious in Mexico City because of *cuatismo* (close friendship). In his ethnography on *The Meanings of Macho* (1996) in a working

class neighborhood in Mexico City, Gutmann gives multiple examples of male's close bonding. While females certainly formed friendships, social imaginaries around the institution of *cuatismo* tend to be masculine.

This was apparent in interviews, when I asked women what they remembered they had learned about friendship while growing up. Luisa for example suggested she learned about friendship from her father:

Ahí si fue más mi papá... Entonces él siempre decía que la amistad era muy importante. Y me decía bueno tú como puedes tener muchas mujeres o casarte, pero las amistades siempre van a estar ahí. Son como lazos muy fuertes. Casi como hermanos...Y a diferencia de mamá...veíamos que no tenía muchas amigas. Entonces siempre que mis hermanas, decían "si mi amiga fulanita" ella decía como que eso no existía...que eso no te dejaba nada bueno.

Yes, there it was my father... He always said that friendship was very important. And he used to tell me: "You can have many women or get married, but friends will always be there. They are like very strong relationships. Almost like brothers. Differently, we could see that my mother did not have many friends. So whenever my sisters would say, "my friend so and so", she would say that it did not exist... that it did not leave you anything good in life.

Differently from Luisa's mother, Monse recalled her mother having many friends. However, inquiring a bit further, Monse's mother was part of a network of gay male friends. Her business partner, a gay male with whom she owned a cosmetic products company, had introduced her to his network of friendship. This is not to suggest that no women spoke of their mother having friends, yet the difference was clear in terms of gender.

As in the case of Luisa's mother, Claudia recalls her mother suggesting that friends would not leave you anything good in life: "*Mi mamá me decía, que no confiara*

*demasiado en alguien, porque me podían traicionar. Que nunca hubiera como amigos en serio/ My mother would tell me to not really trust people, because they could betray me. To never have serious friends”* Liliana also was told that friendship was a loss of time, in her case by her father:

Pues si salíamos y mi papá siempre tenía esa idea de “tus amigas son puras libertinas,” o sea era no sé, para el nadie era bueno, nadie era lo mejor para nosotros. Eso de “¿a qué vas con tu amiga? Puro chisme”... Siempre decía “váyanse a la casa, hagan el quehacer”... o sea esa era su vista de la amistad. Que era una pérdida de tiempo

If we went out, my father always had this idea: “your friends are these libertines.” I don’t know. For him, no one was good, no one was the best for us... It was like “what are you going to do with your friend? Only gossip.” They would always say “Go home, go do your chores”... This was his view of friendship, that it was a loss of time.

For an important portion of the women I interviewed, the cultivation of friendship had not been encouraged. It was considered a practice of the masculine domain, or it was considered as an undesirable activity that brought women away from the family at the mercy of “libertines” and away from “house chores,” as Liliana explains. Relationships in *la casa* could be trusted, while relationships in *la calle* were questionable. It is thus not surprising that Luisa’s father, who approved of friendship cultivation, says that friends are “almost like brothers.” Yet, the term “almost” signals a difference that establishes a distinction between a relation with a brother than with a friend. Such a difference establishes a boundary between the people of *la calle* and of *la casa*.

The association between friendship and masculinity was also present in some of the vocabulary that some women used to refer to their female friends. Gabriela (25 years old) and I met on a weekday in a café in the historical center to complete the interview.

She talked extensively about friendship. She said that it was very important in her life, particularly since she was not so close to her family, although she got along with them. Early on, Gabriela voiced how she refers to many of her close friends with masculine terms (*identifico muchas de mis amistades fuertes en términos masculinos*). One of the words she reserves for her close (mostly lesbian) friends was *compadre*. Traditionally, a *compadre* is the godfather of a child. Nonetheless, men often use the term to refer to their close male friends. She elaborated during the interview why she uses *compadre* instead of its feminine equivalent *comadre*:

La palabra compadre por esto del estereotipo, de que cambia mucho una comadre de un compadre. Una comadre solamente [es] para el chisme y un compadre digamos es compañero... Es leal, siempre esta ahí. La comadre en cualquier momento puede irse por el hombre, por los hijos, o por cualquier otra razón. Y pues el compadre, siempre está ahí. Por eso la relación fraternal con un compadre.

[I use] the word *compadre* because of the stereotype. A *comadre* and a *compadre* are two different things. A *comadre* is only for gossip and a *compadre* is more like a companion... He is faithful, he is always there. *La comadre* can just leave at any time because of her man, because of children, or for any other reason. And the *compadre* is always there. That is why my relationship to *compadres* is fraternal.

In Gabriela's words, *la comadre* is in a heterosexual relationship and she must be at the service of *la casa*, to take care of her man and children. In a traditional patriarchal order, for women, friends must be at the bottom of affective hierarchies. Gabriela's idea on *comadre* reinforces the common stereotype that women's friendships only produce gossip. Their friendships are seen as irrelevant. Gabriela does not clarify what *compadres* produce together, but one thing is clear, he will not let you down. Listening to Gabriela, I was transported to a few years ago when my friend Monse used to call me *hermanito*

(little brother). The use of masculine terms to refer to friends is a common practice in *el ambiente*. Some other friends however strongly critiqued these practices, at times fearing that it fed the stereotype that lesbians want to be men. Interestingly, I never heard women in *el ambiente* referring to one another as *comadres*. *Amiga* (friend) was the most common term to refer to a female friend in feminine terms. The fact that women are encouraged to cultivate relations with people in *la casa*, rather than *la calle*, ultimately raises questions about the possibility of constituting women's networks of friendship and community. Additionally, if *las amigas* are traditionally thought to gossip, the possibility to construct lasting groups of friends may be compromised.

#### *Vital friendships*

Drawing from the writings of women of color such as Lorde, Smith and Sandoval, in his ethnography on race and sexuality in Cuba, Jafari Allen (2011) signals the importance that friendship has had for ostracized communities. In his words:

Here, I want to support the claim by Audre Lorde, Chela Sandoval and others that the practice of loving friendship is a powerful tool (that we have now) that can be used to heal from the multiple and compounded traumas of race/sex terror (Allen, 2011: 131).

For many women I interviewed, queer friendships had been crucial to survive in a heterosexist society. Particularly prior to the 1990s, women I interviewed found out of queer places, through friends. In the late 1970s, María Luisa was a student who lived with her parents. At 19 years old, she began her life in the “queer” world of bars. Gonzalo, a gay man she met in school, invited her to a gay bar after they had both come out to each other. She began visiting predominantly gay male bars such as the Nueve and the

Cuarenta y uno. Gonzalo and María Luisa's friendship served as a cover which effectively concealed not only their gay identities but also their first venturing into queer spaces, from their families who believed they were dating.

In other cases, queer friendships proved to be vital. Claudia, 34 years old, was the only interviewee who had been kicked out from home by her parents for identifying as a lesbian. At the time of the interview, she had settled the conflict with her parents and now lived at home with them. However, when she was 18 years old, her father asked her to change her life or leave the house, after he learned she was dating her theatre teacher. She stayed at a hotel for a few days until the mother of one of her gay male friends invited her to live with them for a few months. Rodrigo's mother did not have a problem with her son's sexual identity and welcomed Claudia at home, as she learned of her precarious situation.

### *Worlds of friendship*

Circles of queer friendships functioned as a small world, which legitimated a different set of codes in particular towards gender or sexuality. This world provided a different window into everyday life. As Selene says:

De hecho las primeras lesbianas que conocí. Lesbianas, lesbianas, no como mi amiga Carrie que también es de clóset, fueron a Gabriela y a Nadia... la empecé a conocer fue, perdí mucho contacto con mis amigos... porque...al fin de cuentas el tener una sexualidad diferente...te crea una perspectiva del mundo totalmente distinta, a la que pueden tener las personas heterosexuales. Por más que te quieran respetar, no llegan a entender hasta qué punto el mundo es totalmente heterosexual. Y con Nadia y con Gabriela me gustó eso que de pronto cuando estaba con ellas, el mundo era lésbico, y entonces sales con ellas y todo puede ser lesbiano. Todo, todo. Todo. Lesbianizaban al mundo... Claro que eso fue en el momento en el que empiezo a hacer un montón de cosas en mi vida.

Ahora estoy otra vez juntándome con mis amigos pero ya desde otra perspectiva....

In fact the first lesbianas I met. Lesbianas, lesbianas, not in the closet like my [best] friend Carrie, were Nadia and Gabriela... I met [them] and I lost contact with my friends... because...in the end to have a different sexuality...creates a totally different perspective than the one heterosexuals can have.... Even if they want to respect you, they do not understand that the world is completely heterosexual. And with Nadia and Gabriela I liked it because when I was with them the world was lesbian, so you go out with them and everything can be lesbian. Everything, everything, everything. They “lesbianize” the world... Of course that was at the moment I began doing a lot of things in my life, now I’m hanging out with my friends again, but from another perspective.

Selene met Nadia and Gabriela at the lesbian university group that met twice a month at a queer café in the Southern part of Mexico City. At first she discovered a new perspective of the world that led her to realize that she lived in a heteronormative society. With Nadia and Gabriela there existed the possibility of uncovering the power dynamics that predominated in the city, but also the possibility of queering the world or more precisely “lesbianizing” (lesbianizar) the world. “Everything” could be seen from a different perspective than the one she had sustained for most of her life. By mentioning her friend Carrie, who is “in the closet,” Selene suggests that it is not sufficient to be attracted to women for gaining a “lesbian perspective.” This situated knowledge implicates the experience of challenging the world as it is, instead of passively complying with its rules. It also implies being part of a world that shares a common grammar that is not always prevalent in heterocentric circles. Selene’s perspective echoes Peter Nardi’s insight in relation to gay men’s friendships in North America. As he says: “Friendship networks are the avenues through which gay social worlds are constructed, the sites upon which gay men’s identities and communities are formed and where the quotidian dimensions of our

lives are carried out” (Nardi 1999: 13). Selene’s quote nonetheless does not only suggest that friendship builds an enclosed world or community, but rather that it is possible to see the city through the eyes of this mobile network of friendships. In the end, Selene returns to some her friends, but she has now gained a new perspective.

Gabriela, whom Selene mentions, also feels that it is different when she is with her lesbian friends, than when she is with other circles of friendship. As she says about how she felt when she met her new lesbian friends: “*cuando conocí a mi nuevo grupo de amigas lesbianas era todo el mundo mágico y sorprendente porque yo no tenía amigas lesbianas, sólo mi pareja...*”/when I met my new group of lesbian friends, the whole world was magic and surprising, because I did not have lesbian friends, only my partner.” As many informants, Gabriela described she had different circles of friends. In her case, she kept contact with her group of friends from *la preparatoria* (high school), a group of women whom called each other *las ratas* (the rats). She also maintained her friendship with some of her college classmates (*los amigos de la facultad*/ department friends). She described this group as mostly being composed of heterosexual males, her ex-girlfriend and a heterosexual couple, with whom she used to hang out regularly. Finally, there was her group of lesbian friends she had mostly formed through the lesbian university group (Grupo lésbico universitario). Gabriela liked hanging out with all of her circles of friends at coffee shops. She described: “*Yo soy mucho de charlas de café. Casi siempre al lugar que voy con mis amistades es una reunión una cafetería. Un lugar para estar sentados y platicar, con café*”/ I am really about coffee talks. Most of the time, the place I go to with my friends is a café. A place to sit and talk with coffee.” As we were sitting ourselves at a

café, Gabriela emphasized the words “with coffee” marking how the beverage was important to the rituals of friendship. When I asked Gabriela if it was different when she hung out with her lesbian friends, she said that “*la diferencia está en hablar de mujeres, con otra mujer/* the main difference is about talking about women with another woman.” Describing further what she means, she says: *Con mis amigas lesbianas puedo hablar de sexo entre mujeres. .. está esa posibilidad ‘no, pues está bien guapa’, ‘¿Te fijaste de su prestigio, su cultura, su educación?’ Cosas por el estilo./* with my lesbian friends I can talk about sex between women...the possibility is there ‘she is so handsome’, ‘did you notice her prestige, her culture, her education’? Things like that.”

While her friends pertaining to other circles are aware that she identifies as a lesbian, she feels that conversations about women and sex between women with her lesbian friends emerge more spontaneously. Perhaps she finds a different kind of resonance, because of their shared taste for women. Gabriela’s words also suggest that her lesbian friends not only comment on women’s looks, but on their cultural capital. This is not surprising given that Gabriela and her friends are university educated. One can question if Gabriela would find the same sense of complicity if she shared a different educational background with her friends. *El ambiente* tends to be stratified by class and the ways in which individuals chose friends and lovers is no stranger to this logic.

### *Friendship and Desire*

Research indicates that female same-sex friendships include at times sexual attraction and sexual exploration (Galupo, 2006). As Morgan and Morgan Thompson (2008) suggest, friendship is at times the conduit through which young women become

aware of their sexual identities or attraction towards women. When she was 16 years old, Claudia (now 34 years old) fell in love with her best friend. They never shared their feelings or had any kind of sexual contact, but an erotic tension inhabited every single of their interactions. As she describes: “*Ella hacía danza y me bailaba, me coqueteaba... me preguntaba cosas [sobre qué opinaba de la homosexualidad], me invitaba a su casa casi todos los días. Éramos muy amigas...yo no... me atrevía a besarla.../* She was a dancer so she would dance for me, flirt with me...she would ask me things [about my opinion on homosexuality], she would invite me to her house almost every day. We were very good friends... I did not...dare kissing her...” Claudia felt deep attraction for her friend, but as she was 16 years old and had never been with any woman, she says she did not dare to take any action. Despite their strong attraction, she indexes their relationship as “*éramos muy amigas/we were very good friends.*” Her words suggest indirectly that friendship might be feel with a sense of erotic attraction. Claudia was not a place in her life where she could materialize or verbalize her attraction to her friend. Nonetheless, many narratives confirm that initial friendship may often lead to a relationship.

In other stories, often taking place in the networks of *el ambiente*, initial attraction gives way to friendship. At times attraction remains, but no desire to pursue a relationship. Gabriela called this type of friendship “*una amistad erotica/an erotic friendship.*” Gabriela met Nadia at the International AIDS conference, as she was taking care of a booth for the organization she worked with at the time. Initial attraction led the pair to close friendship. As Gabriela remembers:

Yo estaba en un stand informativo de... una asociación civil... y mis amistades lesbianas estaban de voluntarias. Entonces esta chica con la que tengo una amistad erótica... la vi y digo "lesbiana." Era todo el estereotipo, lentes, sin maquillaje. No sé. Algo que dice, soy lesbiana. Me llamó la atención porque me parece atractiva. Puedo decir que le coqueteé, ella dice que no, pero yo digo que sí. Y ya de ahí, yo estaba con mi pareja en el stand, empezamos a hablarles... Estaba ella, mi ahora compadre y un amigo suyo. Pero bueno como que a partir de ahí como que nos amamos... luego entre al grupo GLU. Y ahí es donde he conocido más amistades.

I was at the table of...a civil society organization... and my lesbian friends were volunteering. So this friend with who I have an erotic friendship... I saw her and I say "lesbian." She was the whole stereotype, glasses, no make up. I don't know, something that says I am a lesbian. She called my attention because she is attractive to me. I can say that I flirt with her. She says I didn't, but I say I did. And I was there with my partner at the table, we began talking to them...She was there, my now compadre, and a friend of hers. From there on we have like loved each other...then I began going to GLU. And then this is where I have met more friends.

Gabriela found her friend Nadia, attractive at first sight. Despite the fact that she was with her partner, she decided to approach Nadia. Desire worked as the anchor that triggered closeness. The fact that they can joke about the initial moment of their encounter, as to know if Gabriela was flirtatious or not signals a certain amount of trust in their friendship. Gabriela described she had different kinds of friendships, with different friends. She used the term erotic friendship to describe her friendship with Nadia. She explained to me what she meant by this label: "*Que la forma en cómo nos comportamos, cómo nos saludamos, cómo nos miramos, llevamos una relación es muy erótica pero no es sexual/the way in which we behave, how we say hi to each other, how we look at each other, we have a very erotic relation, but it is not sexual.*" Gabriela suggests that their interaction is charged with an erotic tension. It is the small gestures such as "looking" or "greeting each other" that counted. Gabriela and Nadia strongly believed in polyamorous

relationships, so partners were not necessarily a barrier to sexual possibilities. I must admit that I was surprised of Gabriela's confidence because I had never perceived any erotic interaction between the pair, who called each other *compadre* and laughed loudly when present in a crowd. Their deep camaraderie was visible to my eye, but it is true that I was never present when they met by themselves, which affected their interaction. The fact that Gabriela leaves sex aside of friendship is indicative, of the fact that when this barrier is crossed, the idea of friendship might be compromised. The borders and the continuum established by the erotic, the sexual, love and friendship are at times ambiguous in women's lives.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have discussed the ways in which women thought of and practiced intimacy in queer Mexico City. This at a moment in which new discourses on forms of organizing intimacy are circulating, principally through the ideal of same-sex marriage and discussions on polyamory in Latin American lesbian networks. I question how are women taking part in *el ambiente* reconfiguring their views and practices on intimacy in the current context where new forms of organizing intimacy are circulating. Intimacy was understood as the closest realm to the self, a virtual space with no single location in the material world, but that is manifest through various practices, emotional and bodily sensations. Intimate relationships traversed the boundaries between *la casa* and *la calle*. The ideal same-sex couple relation was based on the possibility of an intimate connection, rather than on an economic agreement as it was more common in the

past. A few women mentioned, however, economic or right based motivations for marriage as well. A few decades ago women challenged biology as destiny, through lesbian and polyamorous practices. This was a short lived experiment as the rise of AIDS and the disappearing of the left in Mexico had an influence on sexual and other intimate practices. In contemporary Mexico, polyamorous practices questioned more directly compulsory coupling and monogamy, in the era of same-sex marriage. The polyamorous proposal, reaffirmed nonetheless the need to organize relations based on *confianza*, a global trend that is product of modernity. Questioning the definition of love and the various modes of affection shared between human beings, friendship emerges as a practice in queer space, which also offers the potential of reorganizing the modes in which we think of intimacy in contemporary Mexico City. In the following chapter, I discuss the geography of queer intimacy, and how these are linked to generational formations.

**Chapter 6**  
**Mapping Bodies, Mapping Cities:**  
**Generational Geographies of Desire in Mexico City**

Es que yo creo en todos lados, encuentras ciertos grupos. Mismo en Coyoacán, hay mucha gente gay, en la Zona Rosa, en Polanco ya hay mucho, en las Lomas. De hecho hay muchos antros en las Lomas. En Neza, en el centro, ¿no? O sea estamos abarcando todas las delegaciones. Ja,ja, ja. Estamos avanzando y ganando terreno.

I think you find certain groups everywhere. In Coyoacán there are lots of gay people, in the Zona Rosa, in Polanco... In fact there are many clubs in las Lomas. In Neza, in el Centro, right? We are talking of all districts. Ha, ha, ha. We are gaining terrain.

*-Mónica, interviewee*

In the past decades, Mexico City's mainstream spaces of queer community gathering have grown increasingly visible in urban imaginaries. As Mónica, in her late thirties, comments above, more neighborhoods are associated with queer lives in the megalopolis than ever before. Readers familiar with Mexico City will recognize that the neighborhoods invoked in this quotation represent areas of intense concentration of wealth or poverty. Thus, "we are gaining terrain" might be read as embracing Mexico's City territory and the different class backgrounds, in a country of stark economic disparities.

In this chapter, I look at the ways in which two generations of women have mapped queer Mexico City. I principally concentrate on the 1970s-1980s and contemporary places of *el ambiente* where informants went to in 2009-2010. On one level, mapping pinpoints to the geographical location of queer spaces (*el ambiente*) in Mexico City. In other ways, this exercise reveals the social, political and economic

dimensions of *el ambiente* at a particular point in time. It exposes the ways in which the different places of *el ambiente* are mapped in terms of gender, class and age, questioning the flat understanding of the heterosexual/homosexual binary and its dichotomous organization of space. These different maps reveal a different world at different points in time.

While I think of queer spaces through the notion of *el ambiente*, more broadly than the mere existence of places, the existence of these places is key to community formation. Importantly, the existence of these places is short lived. Bars, cafés, activist houses and other sites of community gathering have appeared and disappeared throughout the years in the city, without leaving any traces of their passage. Thus, I want to explore the ways in which generations could be thought of as constituted through places that have in most cases disappeared today and where common knowledge was circulated. In other words, throughout the chapter I think of the different generations in terms of the maps situated in time that they offer.

In the last two sections of this chapter I question the landscape of intergenerational knowledge transmission. While knowledge is clearly shared among peers of a same generation, the possibilities for transmitting this knowledge to subsequent generations is not clear. Women's culture in *el ambiente* in Mexico City relies on a thin material archive, particularly prior to the 1990s. As women of different generations do not tend to inhabit the same places of *el ambiente*, the possibility for sharing memories through an embodied repertoire appear to be scarce as well. I conclude the chapter by

looking at how women of different generations relate with public affection, re-centering memory on the body.

For the purpose of this chapter I divide interviewees in two different generations. Women of the two “oldest” generations are aged over 40 years old (21/40 interviewees). They were born between 1945 and 1970. In that generation, I pay particular attention to women over 45 years old (13/40), since they tended to refer to more similar places, than women in their early 40s. As previously discussed, they are more closely connected to the new social movements that emerged out of the 1968 student protests. They lived most of their lives under the PRI leadership, which governed Mexico for 70 years. The “youngest” generation was born between 1970 and 1988. The early work of the feminist and LGBT movement had transformed considerably what it means to be a woman and a lesbian in Mexico. Members of this generation witnessed the adoption of neoliberal policies since the late 1980s, the entry of NAFTA, the rise of Zapatismo and lived the shift from *mestizaje* to multiculturalism. Women who were in their 20s at the time of the interview, born between 1981 and 1990, lived almost half of their lives under the PAN’s right wing regime, in the Mexico of public knowledge on feminicides, drug wars and violence. Their narratives reveal that they had had more immediate access to the sites of commercialized queer culture that had become common knowledge in the city. This constituted a different experience than the more secretive places of the 1970s and 1980s that have disappeared today, leaving no trace of their passage.

### **Queer Spaces and the networks of *el ambiente***

In this section I situate the chapter within the field of the geographies of sexuality, and the scarce research on the queer geography of Mexico City. In his study on gay tourism on the Mexican West Coast, sociologist Lionel Cantú (2009) links the emergence of queer spaces of *el ambiente* with processes of urbanization in Mexico that began in the 1940s. In the field of the geography of sexualities, studies on places such as gay neighborhoods and bars initiated in the 1970s (Bell and Valentine, 1995; Browne, Lim and Brown, 2007). At first, this literature largely focused on white gay males in the Western urban world. To my knowledge, “Gay Male Places of Mexico City” by López-López and Sánchez-Crispín (1995) is one of the few articles that focuses on Mexico City and engages with this literature. In their article, López-López and Sánchez-Crispín analyze the patterns of spatial interaction of gay men in Mexico City, focusing on public gay spaces. The authors identify various places visited by men. A majority of these places are situated in a neighborhood called la Zona Rosa. Unlike in the North American and European case, López-López and Sánchez-Crispín notice that gay men do not necessarily live there. More recently, historian Rodrigo Laguarda (2011) writes about the emergence of the *calle* Amberes (Amberes Street) in Zona Rosa since 2007. *Calle* Amberes houses a high concentration of gay bars, restaurants and stores. Laguarda argues that space has the power of legitimizing social groups in a society that differentiates them from one another. In Laguarda’s view, this street provides the gay community with a space to form support networks. Symbolically, *Calle* Amberes renders visible the ‘gay’ community. Nevertheless, a quick walk down Amberes will convince any street walker that males

with a rather youthful and middle-class appearance predominate. López-López and Sánchez-Crispín (1995) and Laguarda's (2011) work remain mostly centered on gay male geographies. Women remain largely absent from these studies.

In his study on gay neighborhoods in San Francisco, Manuel Castells (1983) suggested that these neighborhoods were mostly dominated by males. Castells proposed that women remained largely absent in these neighborhoods for economic reasons. Their purchasing power gave them less choice to determine where they lived. He also suggested controversially that men had a different kind of thirst to dominate territory than women. On these polemical arguments, geographer Gill Valentine (2000) notes that subsequent studies on lesbian neighborhoods in North America and Europe, contested Castells ideas. This research suggested that lesbian neighborhoods did not generally count with bars or other kinds of institutions that are traditionally recognized as gay. In some instances, they counted with bookstores or living cooperatives. In this sense, these neighborhoods had an almost clandestine character, since they were less visible (Valentine, 2000). As I have mentioned in previous chapters, most of my informants lived with, or nearby their families, in very diverse areas of the city. It is therefore difficult to suggest that queer women lived predominantly in particular neighborhoods. The women I interviewed gathered at certain places in La Zona Rosa; nonetheless, as I will discuss multiple gathering sites for women *de ambiente* located outside of this neighborhood.

Researchers have suggested that by focusing on gay neighborhoods and bars, the lesbian subject often remains excluded. In her analysis on gay spaces in Montreal,

Canada, Podmore (2001, 2006) and Peace (2001) propose that the geography of lesbian spaces is revealed when one focuses on women's social networks. Through interaction, individuals produce a space akin to Massey's notion of space. Here space is conceived as the product of interrelations and as a sphere of heterogeneity that is open-ended and in constant construction (Massey, 2005: 9). In a previous essay (2009), I explore the notion of *el ambiente* in Mexico City, which I suggest might be thought of as a queer space. These spaces that are based on networks of interaction may be defined as "a space that emerges through a set of relations, be it sexual, affective, ideological or material that take place between participants" (2009: 39). These networks congregate repetitively in certain places that become visible places, such as the gay bars and neighborhoods. Other ends of the network may attract less participants, or assemble one and only time at a certain place. In this sense, *el ambiente* is not limited to a particular area of the city, but rather in constant movement according to interaction niches charged with queer possibilities. Pinadea, 39 years old, offered a definition of lesbian spaces that was compatible to Massey's notion of space and the concept of *el ambiente*. When I asked her what she considered to be a lesbian space, she suggested:

Es un lugar... no tan físicamente... Se genera a través de la interacción, en el discurso, la presencia de mujeres lesbianas. Es un espacio, puede ser físico, puede ser organizado en un bar, café, hasta en una casa, en un cuarto, en un parque, se generan estos espacios a través de la presencia y de la convivencia de ellas.

It's a place... not really physical... It is generated through the interaction, the discourse, the presence of lesbian women. It is a space, it can be physical, it can be organized in a bar, in a café, even in a house, in a bedroom, in a park. It gets generated through their presence and *convivencia* (hanging out).

Pinadea does not exclusively remain with the bar and the café, but she enters the house, the bedroom, the simple presence of lesbian possibility. She challenges traditional studies in the geography of sexuality that have tended to exclude lesbian's relation to space by focusing on visible gay neighborhoods and bars. She refers to the traditional visible sites of *el ambiente* such as the bar, but her definition also embraces "smaller" places such as the bedroom. The tension between the bar and the bedroom perhaps illustrates that lesbian spaces are formed in *la casa* as much as in *la calle*. Unexpected places such as the park are also listed. While commercial transactions might articulate at times the networks of *el ambiente* in places such as clubs, *el ambiente* is greatly dependent on intimate relations. Relationships of love, friendship, erotic passions sediment the existence of these affective networks. The location and composition of these networks have shifted through time. In the following sections I explore how these networks have changed since the late 1970s.

### **Urban Queer Memories**

One of the differences in terms of narratives on the 1970s and 2009 was the apparent secrecy surrounding the places where women met. Most stories suggested that women heard of queer places in the 1970s and 1980s through word of mouth. Even in the 1990s when places were now advertised in magazines such as *Tiempo Libre* (A magazine on leisure), as discussed in the introduction, I recall having to knock on the door of the café Las Virreinas. A person would come to the door, remove the lock and let the person in.

This was no longer true in 2009, when the door of the café, now *Ellas/Nosotras*, was just open. Various social, economic and political changes, took place, before the lock was removed.

In August 2010, I interviewed scholar and activist Gloria Careaga at Gandhi's bookstore café in Mexico City. Gloria Careaga had been active in various movements, and in particular the LGBTTTI Mexican movement, since the 1980s. During the interview we chatted about LGBT politics in Mexico. While I wanted to speak with activists to gain better perspective on the current political terrain, one idea led to another and we ended up talking about the efforts of the LGBT movements in the past. Gloria recalled how the *marcha* (pride parade) began taking the route that most protests take in Mexico City in the late 1990s. Whether it is a union protesting or citizens united against violence, most mass social protests in Mexico City go down *Reforma Ave.* and end at the *Zócalo*, the main central plaza in the historical district of Mexico City. Intrigued I told Gloria: “*no sabía que antes llegaba al hemiciclo/* I did not know that it used to arrive to the *hemiciclo*” *El hemiciclo* a Juárez is a semi-circular plaza, in which a monument in honor to the first indigenous president, Benito Juárez (1858-1872), was built. Thoughtfully, she replied: “*Toda la vida. En el 99, fue que creo llegamos al Zócalo/* All of life long. In 99, I think is when we first arrived to the *Zócalo*.” “*Ah, yo la primera que fui aquí, fue en el 2000/* Ah. The first time I went to one here, was in 2000,” I said, reminding her that what “all life long” means might differ given our estimated 30 years of age difference. Reflecting for a second, she took a sip of her cappuccino and decided to share the story with me. In 1999, she took part in the debates that led the march to the

Zócalo. She remembered that some were against it because it would break from tradition. As she recalled: “*Había unos que decían que no, porque incluso al hemiciclo, le llamaban “el homociclo/* Some were against it because the hemiciclo was even called the “homociclo.” Others were afraid that not enough people would come to the march and the Zócalo would look empty. Instead, the happy surprise for the organizers was that many people came to the march. Careaga remembers that it was very impressive to see the enormous surface of the Zócalo full of participants united for LGBT rights. In 2010, for the first time since 1999, the march ended again at *el hemiciclo*. The Zócalo had been rented months before for the FIFA festival to project a world-cup soccer game. I told Gloria that it was interesting to hear that the march had travelled from a place to another because this year people were commenting “but why, the march always makes it to the Zócalo?” In her opinion, my statement demonstrated how fast all the work of the LGBT movement was forgotten and the results were taken as a given, as she said: “*Pues sí, pues para las nuevas generaciones es eso. Pensar que el Zócalo ha sido nuestro siempre. Pero no. Desde el 79, 20 años luchamos, marchamos hacía el hemiciclo/* Well yes, for new generations this is what it is. To think that the Zócalo has always been ours. But no, from 1979 on, we struggled for 20 years and walked to the *hemiciclo*.”

Despite the fact that I had lived a total of 7 years in Mexico City since 1998 and visited other times, I had never heard anybody refer to *el hemiciclo* as *el homociclo*. The nickname reflected the “conquest” of this place by the LGBT movement in Mexico City. Since the route of the march changed in the 1990s, traces of queer interaction at *el hemiciclo* a Juárez evaporated in time. New participants ignored what this site had

represented in the past. In the same way than other women of different generations, Careaga and I shared different mental maps on queer Mexico City, particularly, when we added the dimension of time. The nature of *el hemicycle's* occupation every year had soon been forgotten by younger crowds who associated *la marcha* with *el Zócalo*. In remarking that younger generations took the route of the *marcha* as a given, Gloria suggested that many individuals had no idea how it had been in fact very difficult to achieve triumph over this territory. Queering space took time and effort and was no minor task within the set of relations that dominated the city between 1979 and 1999. The marginal histories of Mexico City's queer community soon turn into amnesia. The diverse mental maps that exist on queer Mexico City are evocative of the constant erasure queer places face.

As Laguarda (2009) suggests, because of violence and discrimination, homosexual practices became organized as clandestine acts, to minimize risks and increase efficiency. He writes: "This gave place to the isolation of sexual acts in time and space getting rid of preparation [and departure] rituals... the development of a system of communication that would minimize risks, while maximizing orgasms" (Laguarda, 2009: 109). Although most women I interviewed claimed to have practiced casual sex at one point or another in their lives, furtive anonymous encounters in public urban places were not narrated by any informant. Nonetheless, the bars, the cafés and activist houses where lesbian communities meet remain in the end isolated as well in time and space, as a souvenir that leaves no traces and stays unknown to newer generations. This type of appearing and disappearing of queer places was, thus, not only particular to the *marcha's*

trajectory. In this sense, Mexico's City urban memory is empty of previous queer interactions.

Urban memory “indicates the city as a physical landscape and collection of objects and practices that enable recollections of the past and that embody the past through traces of the city's sequential building and rebuilding” (Crimson, 2005: xii). These objects and surfaces that enable recollection of the past are akin to Pierre Nora's notion of *lieux de mémoire*. These *lieux* (places or sites) are found “where [cultural] memory crystallizes and secretes itself” (Nora 1989: 7). In concrete terms, these are places such as archives, museums, memorial sites, monuments, texts, symbols, rituals, etc. These sites are fabricated and stand in tension with the notion of “milieux de mémoire,” environments where history truly unfolds. Queer places of interaction leave little traces of their passage on Mexico's city urban landscape.

For a moment, I wish to crystalize in time the various maps of queer Mexico City women shared with me, by locating the places and the kind of intimate relations that developed within those walls. This artificial crystallization obscures the fact that these places only existed for a few years, to leave no traces of their passage. I first look at the places, which emerged in the late 1970s to then concentrate on more recent sites.

### **Ephemeral Sites of the late 1970s and 1980s**

When I asked interviewees who were aged of at least 45 years old (13/40 interviewees) about the first time when they visited a site of *el ambiente*, many of them

mentioned the world of bars in the late 70s and early 1980s. These sites of community and consumption played a role in the development of their subjectivities. In the late 1970s, María Luisa was a student who lived with her parents. At 19 years of age, she began her life in the “queer” world of bars. With her friend Gonzalo, a gay man she met in school, she began visiting predominantly gay male bars such as the *Nueve* and the *Cuarenta y uno*. Gonzalo and María Luisa’s friendship served as a cover which effectively concealed not only their queer identities, but also their first venturing into queer spaces, from their families who believed they were dating. As she says:

La primera vez que fui a un bar de ambiente fue al 9 en Londres, cuando yo tenía 19 años...Y entonces yo me esperaba a una cosa así... muy fea... Y no. Que voy entrando a un lugar, una disco bien bonita, limpio el lugar, iluminado y bueno oscuro en otras partes, una cosa hasta muy moderna...y me quedo bueno impresionadísima, porque veo así a hombre guapos, que a parte hablas con ellos son educados, respetuosos, estaba impresionadísima. Me gustó mucho ese bar, pero luego conozco otros que no son nada bonitos... Porque el 9 era caro. Era para clases sociales medias par arriba y luego este el 41 en Hamburgo, para gente común. Ahí dejaban entrar a las vestidas que las llamaban, homosexuales, travestis que en el 9 no entraban.

The first time I went to a bar of el *ambiente*, I went to the 9 on Londres, when I was 19 years old... I expected something horrendous... but no. I went into this place, a beautiful club. Clean, well light and in other parts darker, something very modern. I was so impressed because there were handsome men. You talked to them and they had good manners and were respectful... I really liked this bar...but then I got to know one that was not nice at all... because the 9 was expensive. It was for the middle classes and higher and the 41 on Hamburgo was for common people. They let *vestidas* (transvestites) in at that place... *travestis* who were not allowed to go in at the 9.

The 9 and the 41 were located in the area of the Zona Rosa, a central part of town that is today very clearly associated with queer lives. As she recalls, the 9 was a bar that hosted a middle class clientele, whom performed in her view certain respectability. As

many women of her age I interviewed, María Luisa became a teacher, which was seen as an acceptable occupation for young women in the late 70s and 80s. María Luisa was perhaps aware of middle class norms, due to her family's professional background. The 41 targeted a clientele of a different socioeconomic stratum. Interestingly, María Luisa does not say a word about the physical appearance of the place. She rather equates the challenge *travestis* posed to middle class gendered norms, with the working classes. In more contemporary ethnographic work, *travesties* have been represented as forming part of the culture of the working classes (Prieur, 1998). Middle class *trans* individuals remain largely absent in the literature on Mexico City.

Importantly, María Luisa shared that only a few women gathered in these gay male bars. While *travestis* challenged middle class gendered norm, María Luisa suggested that many women she met in bars did not portray traditional femininity:

Y eran así las que se vestían de hombre, con ropa de hombre, comportamiento de hombre, así pelito muy corto y las que íbamos así como todas las mujeres, heterosexuales. O sea unas de faldita, tacones, cosas así ...

There were those who dressed like men, with men's clothes, men's behaviors and very short hair and those who went there as all women, heterosexuals. Some with a skirt, high heels, things like that...

As she entered the bar scene, María Luisa was asked if she was *azul* (blue) or *rosa* (pink), which could be understood as more butch or femme. Since her appearance was feminine, María Luisa was usually thought to be *rosa*, even if she never felt fully comfortable with these roles. While the blue/pink distinction indicates that there were enough women in the world of bars to create and share a cultural grammar on women

same-sex desire, it is not surprising that men predominated in this scene. Traditionally, cantinas, *pulquerias* and bars had been masculine spaces in Mexico. While the mobility of unmarried women across the city has generally been higher than for married women in Mexico City (Salazar Cruz, 1999), as many interviewees of different ages reported they had been subject to different curfews than their brothers had (particularly in their youth). In this sense, making it to the bar could be difficult for many women. Additionally, women's economic possibilities were limited, in comparison with men. Even if many informants worked at the time they began visiting bars, they held employment that paid little.

While María Luisa mostly visited men's bars, other informants spoke of women's bars. There were two places that were predominantly visited by women or had ladies nights in the late 70s, early 80s: *El Don* and *El Francis Drake*. *El Don* survived for at least two decades. It is in fact the first lesbian bar I visited in Mexico City in 1998, with my friend Sara-Ángel. At my return in 2000, the bar had disappeared. Martha, 48 years old, suggested that going to *El Don* in the late 1970s served to meet women who were questioning their sexual identities as well. When I asked Martha what her first night at the bar was like, she answered:

¡Uy no! ¡Olvídate! Eso sí era vida. ¡Yo dije, de aquí soy Chihuahua! Yo de aquí soy. Ja,ja,ja...Además encuentro un montón de loquitas igual que yo. Que estábamos así: ¿Qué soy coche, camioneta, o que onda, no seremos de otro planeta? Y ya que me dicen, si tú te sientes así, yo también y empiezas a decir aquí es todo una hermandad. Todas estamos ahí, de otro planeta y con el mismo alucine.

Uy no! Forget about it! That was the life! I said: "I am from here!" Chihuahua! I am from here! Ha, ha, ha! I have found many women as

crazy as I am! We were all thinking: What am I? A car, a truck, or what? Are we from another planet? And [women there] told me “you feel like this? Guess what me too!” And that gave you a feeling of sisterhood (*hermandad*). We are all from another planet and we are having the same hallucination!

At *El Don*, Martha found women as her whom had been questioning their feelings and identities. This common questioning provoked a feeling of “sisterhood” among the women who attended the bar. Martha’s intervention highlights the level of marginalization that women loving women lived in the late 1970s. Women thought of themselves, not only at the margins of society, but eons of years away from earth, “from another planet,” challenging the “natural” laws of humanity. It is probably not a coincidence that Martha uses the term “loquita” (crazy women) to refer to the women who went to the bar. Women who defy sexual norms are traditionally called *locas* or *loquitas*. Interestingly, Martha’s description of the bar evokes what in part seemed to be the spirit of the time, when there was the necessity to affirm their mere existence and confirm that they were not “hallucinating” their feelings. More than once Martha dared to confront the social norms of the time face to face. She remembers her participation in the first marches. As she says:

...Fíjate que era bien padre porque juntábamos fondos para comprar las mantas. Las pintábamos nosotros mismos. Y en aquellos años era bien escandaloso... Era más cerrado todo. Como que no querías. No era tanto el orgullo. El orgullo, no, no es cierto. O sea íbamos un tanto camuflajeados, que no nos vieran muy bien, pero sí que se leyeran las mantas, la publicidad.

...It was great. We would fundraise to buy banners. We would paint them ourselves. In those years it was sort of scandalous. Everything was more close minded... like you did not want to be there entirely. It was not so much about pride. Pride, no, no, that is not true. We would be a bit

camouflaged, so people would not really see us, but we would make sure they could read the banner and flyers we had.

By stating that they would hide behind banners, Martha depicts the tremendous weight of being ‘out’ in public in the late 1970s. Under broad daylight, and without the walls of the bar, all that is left to transit the streets and remain alive is a bit of camouflage and a banner. As she states there was “no pride,” yet a sense that these brave actions had a reason to be. While Martha’s narrative depicts difficult times for those who challenged the gender and sexual norms of the time, this quote begins with “it was great.” The feeling of camaraderie and the will to work on a project collectively possibly functioned as a counterweight or an antidote to the repressive climate of the time.

While bars and clubs were a site of encounter for lesbians in the late 1970s, the developing gay and lesbian movement served as a site of community gathering as well. In terms of places, private homes played an important role. María Luisa was 23 years old when she first visited the house of activists, where Oikabeth (a lesbian organization) held their meetings. A friend, whom she had met at preparatory school, brought her to a gathering there. Only women met at Oikabeth: “I almost died! Imagine there were almost 50 women present! It was crazy for me!” said María Luisa about her first time at Oikabeth. The meetings used to take place at a house at that time, as she recalls her first visit:

A los 23 entro al movimiento, digo a Oikabeth... que es el primer grupo de mujeres lesbianas, o de los primeros, ahí esta la disputa... Yo llegué a Oikabeth, por medio de otra compañera con la que estuve en la preparatoria, que siempre fue lesbiana pero nunca me lo dijo. Entonces, empiezo a ir a Oikabeth, empiezo a ir a las reuniones. Me asusto.

“Tantísimas mujeres, no puede ser.” En los bares habían un montón de hombres y una o dos mujeres por ahí escondidas.

When I was 23 I joined the movement, I mean Oikabeth... which is the first lesbian group, or among the first ones, there is a disagreement about this... I arrived to Oikabeth, through one of my friends who had been in preparatory school with me, who always had been a lesbian but she had never told me. So I began going to Oikabeth, I began going to the meetings. I got so scared. “So many women! How is this possible?” At bars there were many men and one or two women hiding around there...Imagine, 50 women...

The house was situated in a central area of Mexico City. At a difference with bars, houses gave the opportunity to participants to meet in a setting not geared towards consumption. Oikabeth was part of a network of leftist organizations that sought to affect social change in Mexico. While many of the leftist groups worked against homophobia, they also engaged on other issues that affected the country’s politics at large and the world. As previously mentioned, the first public appearance of the homosexual liberation movement in 1968 took place to celebrate the Cuban revolution. Informants remember that various activities took place at the house. Josephina, 50 years old, remembers for example: “*En Oikabeth era salir a hacer pintas, redactar volantes, era hacer una investigación para elaborar una ponencia, buscarnos en la historia* /We would just go out and have fun, we made flyers, we conducted research to present a talk, we would look for ourselves in history.” María Luisa remembered that many of their meetings focused on lesbian theory. The possibility of meeting together in a house was also crucial in her opinion. As she says:

Nos reuníamos en una casa en Ámsterdam, en la Condesa. Era la casa de Patria, la dirigente de ese momento. De Patria y de su pareja Leticia. Ahí

nos reuníamos. Ellas eran muy generosas, muy solidarias. Muy solidarias, la mayoría éramos mujeres muy jóvenes, vivíamos con la familia, no teníamos dinero. Estaba muy difícil que tuviéramos un espacio. Un espacio donde vernos, y ellas muy generosamente ofrecían su casa, hacíamos reuniones. Eran reuniones, teóricas, bueno donde veíamos la teoría lésbica.

We used to meet at a house on Amsterdam Street, in la Condesa. It was the house of Patria, the leader at that moment... and of her girlfriend Leticia. We used to meet there. They were very generous and expressed a lot of solidarity, a lot of solidarity. Most of us were very young women. We lived with our families. We did not have money. It was very difficult to have a space, a space for ourselves, and they were very generous and they offered their houses. These were theoretical meetings, well were we explored lesbian theory.

María Luisa fondly remembered the role played by the house, as a space to meet. As she suggests, most women who visited the house were young and lacked resources. In addition, the homophobic context of the time rendered difficult the possibility of meeting openly in public places. As mentioned, the world of bars has commonly been associated with men in the city. It is important to notice in María Luisa's testimony on her first days at Oikabeth that a few individuals who possessed a space, solidarity and resources were sufficient to fuel a community. Solidarity, more than individual resources of all participants seem to be key here. Most participants lived with their families. The house on Amsterdam Street contained a different kind of intimate bonds that solidified networks of solidarity and friendship. Further during the interview, María Luisa reveals she met some of the first women she dated at Oikabeth. Stories of love, sex and platonic attractions proliferated within these walls giving rise to the erotic networks of *el ambiente*. Most women who arrived to Oikabeth, heard about it through a friend. At a difference with women of younger generations whom found lesbian groups through

informative radio or television shows in the late 1990s, or later through the Internet, women in the late 1970s and 1980s strongly relied on word of mouth.

Oikabeth continued meeting in the neighborhood *La Condesa* until the mid-1980s. In *Un amor que se atrevió a decir su nombre* (2000), Norma Mogrovejo suggests that one of the possible reasons for which Oikabeth vanished in the mid-1980s, in addition to internal tensions, is that the economic crisis pushed many of its participants to find a job or intensify work to make ends meet at home. The difficulty to embrace a schedule that integrated various facets of life beyond day to day survival jeopardized the activist project and further possibilities to form community. According to Mogrovejo (2000) Lesvoz, a lesbian feminist organization was founded in 1977. The organization remains active until today. However, none of the 40 women I interviewed directly participated in this organization. More recently some attended their annual basketball or soccer tournament, which provided a space for women to meet. However, none of my interviewees participated in their meetings throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

In brief, queer women's visible spaces appear to have been located in central neighborhoods in Mexico City, such as Zona Rosa and La Condesa. The world of bars and activism often served as meeting points. Places in the world of bars were often located in-between the spaces created by gay men, although some bars were mostly addressed towards women. Those spaces, although oriented towards consumption, provided the opportunity for creating community and a common social and cultural grammar, built through the experience of women loving women. Bars identified by informants were mostly located in or near the Zona Rosa. Bars were marked by class

hierarchies, as some catered to a wealthier clientele. These places remained however located a few blocks from one another. Bars, which were traditionally understood as a masculine site of socialization, were not the main place where women met. As some informants revealed, some activists would open the doors of their homes to other women. The orientation of these groups was often openly political, seeking transformation in a heterosexist society. The possibility of meeting at the house of lesbian activists fueled the proliferation of entire communities. Finally, many women lived their lives with other women without ever forming part of traditional queer spaces. The home, the bedroom, the office and friend's homes did not commonly figure among the mentioned queer spaces, but lives unfolded there as well.

### **Contemporary Queer Maps**

*Field notes on 10/10/2009*

*I took the Metrobus on Insurgentes from Mónica's house to make it to this event. The streets were empty since Mexico was playing [soccer] against El Salvador. I walked the streets of Zona Rosa walking into a world I had never encountered before. La Zona Rosa had literally been transformed into a queer zone, where the gays, lesbians, punketos, darketos, indigenous, the tourist, the futbolista who watches a partido on Saturday afternoon coexisted. I was stunned to see all these young boys and girls walking hand in hand. This was definitely not the case 10 years ago, and even 3 years ago... You do not...see this in North American towns. It was stunning...but then again Mexicans love to hold hands in comparison with North Americans. The Zona Rosa had visibly become a queer zone.*

In the excerpt above, I was on my way to a reading at the bookstore Voces en Tinta that is located in La Zona Rosa. I found the appearance of this central part of town different from what I recalled. In 1998, when I first began visiting this part of town, it used to be

associated with queer lives as well, but one could more easily walk into this “zone” and never realize the large amount of gay oriented bars, and cruising spots. La Zona Rosa was more easily associated with tourism and nightlife in general by the Mexico City population. Late at night sex workers would look for work down Reforma Avenue. In early 2000, Mexico City’s administration pushed them away from commercial areas towards the North. Since 1998, queer lives had become every time more visible in national public life. The election of lesbian activist Patria Jiménez and the first Forum on Sexual Diversity and Human Rights in the Federal District Assembly in 1998 “marked a symbolic turning point in activists’ relations with the legislative field” (De la Dehesa, 2010: 147). It is at this point and thereafter that the adoption and conversations on anti-discrimination laws, civil unions, same-sex marriage and adoption, queer-friendly city projects initiated. In 2000, the PRI that had ruled for 70 years, lost the year 2000 election. Nevertheless, Mexico City had been however governed by the PRD, a left wing party, since 1998. Drug wars, feminicides, the militarization of the Northern border and unemployment were buzz words in the papers and in everyday life all along fieldwork. As a result of the global crisis, 2009 was one of the worst unemployment years in the country.

On that night of October 2009, it would have been impossible to walk through those streets without noticing that display of public affection by individuals of the same-sex was common, not to say predominant, in this part of town. However, as I mention in my notes other visible identitarian possibilities co-existed on the streets, where the soccer fan, walked next to the gay, the indigenous woman from the sierra, the alternative

*punketos*, *darketos*, etc. and the tourist attentive to this spectacle. Coexistence is at times tense, as it occurred in 2008 when *emos* who largely meet in Zona Rosa, were systematically bashed in Mexico City. Blogs criticized their music style, attitude and subculture, which includes feminine style of clothing. Some commentators have thus catalogued these attacks as homophobic (Grillo, 2008), or “emophobic” as a post on a government youth-website forum testifies, which reads “I hate emosexuales” (Madrigal, 2008). The coexistence of children with rag-clothes selling gum to people in line about to enter an expensive club is not only characteristic of La Zona Rosa. Marginalized bodies, walked down perfect cobblestone streets adorned by designer boutiques, restaurants, bars, hotels and a couple of quesadillas, hotdog and burger carts, which provided the cheapest supply of food in the neighborhood.

For the women I interviewed, La Zona Rosa was the part of town they most commonly associated with *el ambiente* (queer spaces). For example, when I asked Liliana, 33 years old, which parts of town were related to *el ambiente*, she says:

Pues la Zona Rosa! ... pues aquí [antes era] por las mujeres, por las prostis, según esto era la zona roja y ahora esto es, se identifica luego, luego con homosexual, con lo gay, no sólo yo, sino la Ciudad entera... de aquí brota.

Well, la Zona Rosa! ... in the past this was more like La Zona Roja (the red zone) because of the prostitutes, but now people identify it right away with homosexuals, with gays. Not only me, but the entire city... here [queers] grow like grass.

Not only interviewees, but as Liliana remarks the whole city, identifies La Zona Rosa as the “gay” neighborhood of the city. At work, Luisa was accused of harassment by a coworker for simply asking her if she ever hung out in Zona Rosa. Luckily for Luisa her

boss considered the incident homophobic instead. This anecdote shows the extent to which this area of town has come to be associated with the LGBT scene. As Rodrigo Laguarda (2009) has discussed, la Zona Rosa is coded as a cosmopolitan scene, which is perceived as bringing Mexico to the level of world city. While some LGBT individuals might reside in the area, I have only met two in the past ten years; and none of the interviewees lived there at the moment of the interview.

In *Calle Amberes: Gay Street de la Ciudad de México* (Amberes Street: Gay Street of Mexico City) Laguarda (2011) discusses the emergence of *calle* Amberes as “the gay street” of Mexico City since 2007. *Calle* Amberes counts with multiple restaurants, bars, clubs and stores directed to the gay population. The street is filled with hegemonic gay signs that are found across borders, such as the rainbow flag. Many restaurants, bars and club names come directly from the English language (e.g. Lipstick, Pussy bar, Boybar). The use of English evokes the association between queerness and cosmopolitanism. While a mixed crowd may be present at each of these locations, only one of the places the *Pussy bar*, is (as one can imagine) geared towards women. Most women at this bar are aged between 18 and 25 years old. Younger women who do not have the age to enter a bar stand on the side walk outside of the bar, which has become the hang out place for younger LGBT individuals. On a Saturday afternoon, crowds are at times greater on the sidewalk than in the bar. Some clubs such as Lipstick have a ladies night. Many of the bars do not have a cover charge, but those that do tend to be rather expensive for the majority of Mexico City inhabitants. Lipstick for example, one of the bars some of interviewees occasionally visited cost 150 pesos in 2010 (approximately 13

US\$). An individual working at minimum wage (5 pesos a day) would have to work for an entire month to enter the club.

On a Thursday I met with my old friend Martha, whom I had not seen in 10 years. Martha had noticed that my friend Deborah had tagged me on a picture on *Facebook*. She then emailed me and asked if I was in Mexico City, to which I replied yes. She immediately wrote to me and invited me to meet for coffee before going to a ladies night she was organizing at a club every Thursday. Martha worked in public relations in the LGBT scene. She said that since she worked for clubs, she had moved away from the lesbian movement that tended to dislike entrepreneurs working on the LGBT scene. In their opinion, entrepreneurs followed money and corrupted the movement. She said that even if the movement disliked clubs “*las chicas iban a salir a divertirse de todos modos/ girls will still go out to have fun.*” She saw in fact a transformative potential in the energy of fun and, in providing a space for women to meet. Her idea echoed the words of some interviewees. Mónica, 38 years old, recalled what these queer spaces had meant in her youth. As she said:

Fue muy importante en mi vida en los 20s y parte de los 30 es los antros. Era un espacio donde yo me sentía segura, donde sentía que tenía la libertad de ser quién era, este y sacar la represión que de alguna manera me he auto-impuesto a lo largo de los años, para que no se me note, o que no me critiquen, o para que no se burlen de mí. Entonces el antro me daba esa posibilidad de ser quien yo era y saber que nadie me iba a juzgar.

*Los antros* (clubs) were a very important part of my life in my 20s and 30s. It was a space where I felt safe, where I felt I was free to be whom I am and push away repression which in many ways I imposed on myself for years to not seem gay, to avoid criticism, or to avoid people making

fun of me. Bars gave me this possibility to be who I am and know that no one was going to judge me.<sup>38</sup>

For Mónica, as for many women I interviewed, bars had represented the possibility of forming community in their lives. With her gay male friends, Mónica had visited many places in her 20s and early 30s. Now, she occasionally visited bars in La Zona Rosa, but she felt at odds with the clientele that was significantly younger. As she says: “*Y se te quedan viendo como ‘Ay señora ya no está en edad de estas cosas’. Ja,ja,ja. Porque muchos, pues 5 años más, pues es la edad de sus mamas/* And they stare at you like saying ‘Ma’am you don’t have the age anymore for these things.’ Ha,ha,ha. Because for many, 5 more years, and I am their mother’s age.”

I asked Martha about the women’s bars and parties in Mexico City. As most of my informants, most of the places she named were located in Zona Rosa, with the exception of a club around Satelite she had heard of, where *chicas fresas* (~ rich snobby girls) went. The clientele at El Botas was mainly older women, she labeled them as *señoras*. María Luisa and Claudia had told me a few weeks before about El Botas. They had complained about the fact that right before Valentine’s day the cover charge had gone up to 100 pesos, when it usually cost 80 pesos (7 US dollars approximately). “Do you get at least a show or something special for 100 pesos?” I asked. “Yes, a drink and a show” said Claudia. She continued: “A show with my girlfriend Joanne! She’s so hot! Ha, ha.” Joanne was a dancer at Botas. María Luisa and Claudia went on to comment on how she gives private dances that last the time of a song for a 1000 pesos (~77 US\$). “Even if it was Thriller that lasts 13 minutes, I don’t really see the point of paying for

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this,” said Claudia. María Luisa laughed and commented on how some people probably do it, if this service exists.

According to Martha younger women, she called *chavas* went to Cabaret Tito on Thursdays, while *chicas fresas* went to Lipstick on that same night. Despite the middle-class orientation of La Zona Rosa, Martha still identified socioeconomic differences between some of the places visited by women. Age also strongly marked difference, as in Martha’s words *las señoras* and *las chicas* did not necessarily visit the same places.

We could not believe that 10 years had gone by. “This street did not even exist 10 years ago,” I told Martha recalling our intrepid adventures in *el ambiente* in 2000. I asked Martha if bars still had to give *mordidas* (bribes) to the police to be protected. She said no, but at the moment there was a discussion about closing the bars at 3am. There were police raids, but they were not specifically directed to gay bars. Around 10pm, we walked towards Cabaret Tito. As we were standing at the door some women were commenting about a fight that occurred outside of the bar on the previous week. Martha mentioned that one of the problems with “girl’s nights” was that women fought, while in her opinion this was not common among gay men. Over the years I have spent in Mexico City, I have heard this narrative more than once. Yvonne, 34 years old, told me during the interview that she recalls seeing a punching bag outside of a Cabaret Tito. Women were encouraged to take out their rage of the bag. I never heard of this story anywhere else, but its existence confirmed the symbolic association between women’s bars and violence. We entered the bar, without paying any cover and Martha offered me *aguas minerales*

(sparkling water) that were free for her as she was the organizer. Young women were dancing to *cumbias* and *rock en español*, drinking, talking to their friends and perhaps flirting. Martha assured me that besides the occasional fights, it was rather an easy going place (*bastante tranquilo*). At midnight the traditional midnight show you can find at almost any queer club in Mexico City started. The show generally features a drag queen, followed by a strip dancer. Soon enough women gathered around Celia Cruz, being impersonated on stage. I had to leave to make it to the last subway train.

In brief, the contemporary maps on queer Mexico City that were offered to me by informants were generally centered on La Zona Rosa. As in the past, bars of *el ambiente* mostly targeted men, although a few places were addressed to women. Through the efforts of entrepreneurs, and some activists, *calle* Amberes became the most visible gay street in Mexico City after 2007 (Laguarda, 2011). While many women visited the bars of this street, some younger ones simply hung out on the sidewalk, as they did not have the age to enter those establishments. Crowds mostly in their 20s visited the bars, although places such as El Botas served a clientele of women mostly in their 40s and 50s. Middle class women predominantly visited some locations rather than others, such as Lipstick. While there exists a strong critique towards these commercialized places in terms of their transformative potential, these were the primary sites of community gathering for many informants, where they felt they could express their intimate desires openly.

### **Alternative Maps de Ambiente**

One of the questions I asked during the interview was “If you would give me a tour of *el ambiente*, where would you bring me?” Most women named places located in Zona Rosa, but others reflected at times on other places. Cafés, bars and sites of meeting for lesbian groups are located in diverse areas of town. These places are far less visible and tend to be associated with other characters than the cosmopolitan gay male. I knew some of these places or voluntarily searched for them. For example, various cafés are located in the Southern area of town such as the women’s café Ellas/Nosotras (previously Las Visreinas) near Plaza Universidad, the café el Maguey a few blocks from the National University (UNAM) and the women’s café D’Allys located in Xochimilco. Less visible sites such as soccer and basketball teams, spontaneous gatherings of friends in plazas, parks, houses, etc. may also be labeled *de ambiente*. While women who visit these cafés are still expected to consume on the premises, the cafés are quieter and promote interactions such as conversations between attendants. Not only does the geographical location differ, but often the kinds of activities in these locations differ from the ones of the bar culture.

When I asked Luisa, 31 years old, who owned a chicken stand at the market, where she would bring me for a tour of *el ambiente*, she mapped an itinerary slightly different from the majority. She said:

...Te llevaría a la clase de yoga, te llevaría al torneo de basquetbol, te llevaría a este de Voces en Tinta que de repente se hacen cosas como más intelectuales o más artísticas...te llevaría a cosas que no tengan que ver con el alcohol.

I would bring you to the yoga class. I would bring you to the basketball tournament. I would bring you to Voces en Tinta, there are more intellectual or artistic things there... I would bring you to things that are not related with alcohol.

Luisa's vision of *el ambiente* differs from the traditional gay bar and neighborhood. Luisa is very much aware of the existence of these sites, but the itinerary she proposes challenges the hegemony of these places. Her critique is not so much about their commercial nature, but rather the fact that they are founded on a sociality that is incessantly lubricated by alcohol. Instead she suggests leisure sites, where the common love for an activity such as yoga, basketball, intellectual endeavors or the arts facilitates the exchange. Luisa was not the only interviewee to complain about the pervasiveness of alcohol in *el ambiente*. In fact, several of them mentioned that the visible sites of *el ambiente* were no longer of interest to them as they fostered particular kinds of dynamic. Deborah describes how she is no longer interested in these places:

...ya no me llaman la atención, o sea... en sí nunca me llamo mucho la atención... y voy y es lo mismo. Entonces: tomar, ver como te están ligando, como... [esta] pareja te está ligando y ya. O sea yo ya lo tomo así como que de burla, como que... ya ni siquiera es emocionante. No sé si ya estoy ruca o ya es así como que, o ya me perdí el chiste.

... I'm not really intrigued anymore, I mean... it never intrigued me that much... and I go there and it is the same thing. So, drinking, to see how people are flirting, how [this] couple is flirting with you and that's all. Now, I take it as a joke, like...it is no longer exciting. I don't know if I am old or if I don't get it anymore.

Deborah finds that the common sites of *el ambiente* such as the bars are about alcohol and flirting. By suggesting that a couple attempts picking her up, Deborah depicts an environment where the traditional rules of flirting and coupling are "broken." While she

might have found it exciting in the past, she has grown blasé of the intensity of the party scene. She questions if the issue is not simply that she is older now and she does “not get it anymore,” as if because of age she had become an outsider. Nowadays, Deborah hung out with different circles of friends and from time to time she visited places of *el ambiente*. During fieldwork, I recall going to a bar of *el ambiente* twice with Deborah and other friends. I remember far more times hanging out at Monse’s, having coffee, going to the theatre or eating fish soup at the market with her in places that would not be labeled *de ambiente* traditionally.

At a meeting of the Lesbian University Group (GLU), we discussed where we could hang posters to promote *La Jornada Lésbica*, a week of activities on lesbian culture that takes place at the UNAM. One of the participants at the meeting who worked at a day care suggested she would put some posters at *mercados* (markets). Rosa said that many housewives feel very isolated and they often go to markets. She was speaking from experience as Rosa had been a housewife for many years. She had recently separated from her husband. I do not know for a fact if Rosa hung the poster at her local market in the end, but the fact that she thought that a poster on a lesbian event could be placed at a place unrelated with queer culture, illustrates the climate towards queer culture in the city.

Traditional spaces of *el ambiente* where the dynamics of alcohol, dancing and flirting predominate often coincide with La Zona Rosa. Other kinds of spaces tend to be geographically located in other parts of the city (see map). It is however illusory to divide these spaces as entirely disconnected. Often informants circulated between them. In 2001,

when I took part in a soccer team that was not officially queer, but where most players visited places of *el ambiente*, we planned a couple of times to play pool after the game. I remember a few times traveling towards near La Zona Rosa to visit el Anyway, a club that was popular at the time. Also flirting and drinking were not exclusive to the bar scene. Claudia, who was the yoga instructor at the lesbian group Shakti (Les Yoga) told me that many women attended her class to meet other women. Laughing, she suggested that this was not the goal of her class, but she did not condemn those students recognizing that places to meet other women were few.

I met many of the interviewees through common alternative site(s) of *el ambiente*: groups. As discussed in previous chapters, Mexico City counted with diverse queer women groups. Some like Oikabeth had existed in the 1980s and had now disappeared. In 2000, I spent a lot of time at the Clóset de Sor Juana, an activist organization that was also open to the public. Women met for different kinds of workshop activities (painting, writing, etc.), occasional parties or just to hang out with other women. The same week I interviewed Gloria Careaga in 2010, she told me that the Clóset had closed its doors to the public, and the lesbian-feminist organization was in the process of reinventing itself. Many interviewees remembered the vibrancy of the Clóset in the late 1990s and early 2000s, but at the present moment other organizations such as the Grupo Lésbico Universitario, Mujeres Mayores de 30, Musas de Metal and Opción Bi, among others were more often visited by women I interviewed. All of these groups met in rather central areas of the city. Most subway lines passed near the geographical center of the city. None of these meetings took place in Zona Rosa. Alma, an interviewee, traveled an hour and a

half from Estado de México to come to the meetings of Musas de Metal. At the time of fieldwork, Musas de Metal met at a location they rented twice a month in La Condesa. However, the group had moved many times in their past 15 years, which was not unusual for these groups.

For groups meeting at cafés such as the university group GLU, participants had to consume to continue having their meetings. At other locations, participants gave a contribution to the group, so they could pay for the rental of the space. In other words, none of these places were free of costs. It was generally cheaper to attend the cafés than the bar, but it is not impossible that certain women might have had to consult their budget to see whether they would be able to attend or not. Entering queer spaces of socialization often entailed a cost that determined who could afford to attend particular places. At the same time, in the case of groups with non-lucrative goals, organizers had little choice but to ask the support of participants, since they had to pay the rent or honor the cafés that was lending the space. In this sense, costs were often difficult to avoid.

### **Knowledge transmission, space and place**

The sites visited by women in the 1970s, differed from the ones women in 2009-2010 visited in terms of their geographical location and extension. The visible presence in various parts of the city perhaps reflected the climate in which the City administration underwent IGLTA certification to proclaim Mexico City as gay-friendly and attract in large part “pink tourism” (EFE, 2007). The dynamics of gender that divided

women between *rosa* and *azules* appeared to be obsolete in recent years. Places appeared to have been divided by class in the past as in the present. One important difference in 2009-2010 was that *el ambiente* now clearly counted with diverse generations of women. For the most part women of different age groups spent time in different places. In the absence of ‘lieux de mémoire’ in remembrance of a queer past and scarce opportunities for socialization, how is knowledge transmitted intergenerationally in *el ambiente*?

As noted, visible places of *el ambiente* have appeared and disappeared throughout the past decades, leaving no trace of their passage on the city. No museum, monuments or public mnemonic device in remembrance of a queer past marks the urban landscape. In early 2000, I remember visiting the historical archive, the *Archivo Historico Nancy Cárdenas* that was located at a Mexico City Women’s Institute (CIAM). The archive was open to the public for a few years and is now, according to scholar Norma Mogrovejo, looking for a new institutional home. The total absence of official modes of memorialization does not necessarily call for the necessity of creating places such as queer museums. Rather it brings us back to the question of how knowledge is transmitted. What kind of temporal narratives on the existence of *el ambiente* prevail? How do communities imagined through narratives other than a past-present-future make sense of themselves and relate to one another?

In general, the printed word in relation to LGBT issues had remained absent for years in the lives of older interviewees, including in terms of cultural productions. Alicia, 65 year-old physician, told me that too often she spent about 150\$ per pay check at the book store *El Armario Abierto*, which specialized on sexuality issues. She bought novels,

essays, ethnographies, poetry books, etc. When I asked her where she would get her books before *El Armario* existed, she replied:

No se conseguían. Ni con la lupa de Sherlock Holmes. Ja,ja,ja. No sé si conoces un libro que salió en los años 60s. “El pozo de la soledad.” Pues ese fue el primer libro de que yo leí de tema lésbico. Y bueno termina... en lo establecido de la sociedad de ese tiempo. Se muere casi de angustia y de desesperación la mujer, que ama a la otra mujer.

You could not even find them with Sherlock Holmes’ magnifying glass. Ha, ha, ha. I don’t know if you know a book that came out in the 1960s. *The Well of Loneliness*. Well that was the first book I read about a lesbian theme and it ends... with what was established in society at the time. The woman who loves another woman almost dies of anxiety and ends up desperate.

Alicia says that the first book she remembers reading that included a lesbian character was *The Well of Loneliness* by Radcliffe Hall. While the book was originally published in 1928, the second edition of one of its translations *El Pozo de la Soledad* was published in 1957 by Editorial Diana in Mexico City. Seemingly, Alicia interprets the tragic events in the book as reflecting the climate of the time. It is, however, unclear if “the time” is Mexico City in the 1960s or Western Europe in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Similarly, Bellota of 45 years old recalls reading *The Well of Loneliness*. It was also the first book on women who loved women she read, but in the 1980s. She felt deeply moved by the book and in her case there is no doubt that she thinks the tragedy of the book reflects the lives of more contemporary women. As she says: “¡Híjole, ese sí! Como que madre santísima que lo que vivió la chava como que así lo vive la mayoría/ Hay, that one yes! Like holy mother, what this girl lived is similar to what most of us live.” She even remembers folding the cover to hide it and hiding it behind other books. Alicia and Bellota both found their books at a used bookstore. It is not impossible that other written lesbian

cultural productions existed in Mexico prior to the 1990s, but if they did none of my informants mentioned them. The first Mexican novel *Entre Amoras* by RosaMaría Roffiel with openly lesbian characters was published in 1989. Two main magazines were published in the 1990s, *Las Amantes de la Luna* (not published anymore) and *Les Voz*, which continues being published since 1994. The written word in relation to lesbian issues in Mexico was therefore scarce before the 1990s.

In Diana's Taylor (2003) use of the term, lesbian culture in Mexico City relies on a thin archive (enduring materials such as CDs, books, buildings, etc.). For months, I mused over the idea that knowledge in *el ambiente* is therefore largely transmitted through a repertoire (a set of ephemeral embodied practices). While this is in part true on a peer-to peer level, it is doubtful that it is also the case at an intergenerational level, precisely because of the fact that *el ambiente* is often divided by age at the moment. As mentioned earlier, lesbian organized groups such as *Mayores de 30* targets specific age groups. In practice, most of the attendants are around their late 40s or 50s. Particular bars of *el ambiente* attract clients of certain ages. Women of different generations do not tend to share the same places in *el ambiente*. By no means do I want to suggest that these trends are never challenged. For months, I drank tea every week with María Luisa after yoga practice at Shakti (Les Yoga). Elrolloes, also in her fifties, had a girlfriend in her thirties at the time of the interview. Women generally dated women of approximately their own age. At *Musas de Metal*, women of different ages visited the group, although the majority was in their thirties. On an occasion a mother accompanied her questioning daughters to the group, to demonstrate her support and perhaps acquaint herself with this

environment. Aside from these few occasions it seems that the possibilities of transmitting intergenerational knowledge in *el ambiente* remain rare. Queer lives are largely “learned” through peer to peer networks of interaction.

### **Mapping Violence: The Place of Public Affection in the City**

One of the few intergenerational event and queer *lieux de mémoire* I could identify was *la marcha*. Papers of mass circulation often situate *la marcha* as an international event. For example, in 2011 an editorial article in *La Jornada* begins with the words: “As every year, the celebration of the Day of Lesbian and Gay Pride reached out to hundreds of groups and isolated citizens in the streets of diverse cities of the world, including the ones of this capital” (2011). Clearly *la marcha* is here thought as an international event. As discussed in chapter 3, the official discourse of *la marcha* in 2010 clearly situates it in Mexican history. Nonetheless, the march still takes place in June joining the hundreds of marches around the world that commemorate more or less explicitly the Stonewall riots in the United States. Under the impact of processes of globalization, memory communities and spaces are being redefined (Assmann and Conrad, 2010). *La marcha* is one of the few *lieux de mémoires* in *el ambiente*. While it commemorates certain events that took place in New York City, by being numbered it always reminds the number of years it has been repeated in Mexico City. In 2010, participants took part in the 32<sup>nd</sup> *marcha*. This cyclical performance takes the streets once a year. The official theme of *la marcha* also changes every year.

The embodied act of *salir a la calle* (going out to the streets) is of importance here as *la calle* was for years the site of potential violence, thus the walls of the bar, the house, the locale where organizations meet. I do not want to suggest that *la casa* was free of danger. The threat of physical violence, the voice of endless arguments or the repetitive anxiety of concealing may certainly be part of *la casa*. However, the fact that women in *el ambiente* often socialized in enclosed spaces, marks it out of the literal *calle*. These places of gathering might be marked as “safe spaces” (although the violence of classism rampant in Mexican society and other forms of discrimination are at work in those spaces as well). To be/act visibly queer on the streets may have its costs. This was particularly true in the past when police extortion for ‘moral faults’ were part of the routine. Nonetheless, nowadays Mexico remains the second-highest ranking country in Latin America for homophobia related hate crimes (Brito and Bastida, 2009).

When I was conducting fieldwork in 2009, not a week went by without seeing two women or two men expressing romantic or erotic affection to one another on the streets. This was in part related to my proximity to the university full of youth in love (I assume), but it was also noticeable in other areas of town. Displays of heterosexual public affection from people of different age groups are extremely common in Mexico City. I became interested in investigating generational patterns of the use of public space among women who participate in queer spaces, after I began noticing that all my informants over 45 years old (except for one) claimed to never display public affection, while younger interviewees all did. “Do you ever demonstrate public affection with your partner, lovers,

etc.?” became the question in my questionnaire where I could predict the answer in advance.

Younger women’s answers varied at times, signaling to areas of town where they would not demonstrate public affection. These areas of town related to their personal lives and included spaces such as: “at my parent’s” or “in front of work.” The majority however answers affirmatively as Luisa, 31 years old, did when I asked her: “¿Y andas de la mano a veces con tu pareja en la calle? /Do you ever hold hands with your partner on the streets?”:

A: ¿Y andas de la mano a veces con tu pareja en la calle?

L: Todo el tiempo.

A: ¿Y hay partes de la ciudad en las que no te sentirías a gusto de andar de la mano?

L: No. En todos lados hemos andado de la mano, nos damos nuestras muestras de cariño.

L: All the time.

A: Are there parts of town where you would not feel comfortable holding hands?

L: No. We hold hands everywhere; we give affection to one another.

As I tried finding a space where “all the time” did not apply, I asked:

A: ¿En la oficina de tu clientes?

L: No. Pues me ha acompañado. Nunca ha entrado conmigo a ver un cliente pero, no.

A: Entiendo. Cerca del edificio si le darías la mano.

L: Claro, claro. Se la doy, por supuesto.

A: In your client’s office?

L: No. Well, she has been there with me, but she has never been into my clients' offices.

A: I see. Near the building you would hold hands with her?

L: Of course, of course. I would.

For Luisa there was no place in the entire city where she would not hold hands with Yvonne. As I challenged her with one of the gray zones some of the women of her age I had interviewed provided, she still suggested she felt comfortable holding hands. Luisa worked for an advertisement agency and visited many companies to offer advertising space in various papers.

Many of the women above 45 years old suggested that they did not express public affection because they feared a physical aggression. Remaining out of sight was a form of protection in a context that they presumably read as homophobic. Nonetheless, many women also mentioned that they were fully aware that younger women were demonstrating public affection. For example, Grace, 53 year- old, answered:

G: ¿Caminar de la mano? ¡Nunca! Del brazo sí, pero de la mano... por ejemplo si [ mi pareja y yo] íbamos en el transporte público, tocaba sentarnos juntas, pero siempre de manera disimulada, que no se notara.

A: ¿Hay espacios en la ciudad en los que nunca te hubieras sentido a gusto de demostrar afecto?

G: Pues, sí, casi la mayoría de los lugares... Aunque para mí, mi necesidad, deseo es que en el futuro este yo en cualquier lugar pueda yo acercarme a darle un beso, a tomarla de la mano, o estar juntitas, lo mismo que hace una pareja heterosexual.

G: Walking hand in hand? Never! Holding arms maybe, holding hands... for example if [my partner and I] were in public transportation and we were sitting together but always hiding, in a way it could not be noticed.

A: Are there places in the city where you would not have felt comfortable to hold hands?

G: Well, yes, in most places... Even if for me, my need, my wish in the future is to be able to come close to my partner and kiss her, hold hands or be together, in the same way a heterosexual couple does.

Generations of women participating *el ambiente* co-exist in the same city. However, the ways in which they act in space considerably changes, most likely due to the different contexts in which bodies were disciplined. Although the context has broadly changed in the past 30 years in Mexico City, enabling the mere existence of queer lives, fear often remains as Yazmín expressed. In *Place/Out-of-Place* (1996), Cresswell suggests that individuals, things and practices are related to particular places. When this relationship is broken a person, object or practice might be seen as acting “out-of-place.” In Luisa’s words holding hands with her partner is not a practice “out-of-place” anywhere in the city. Differently, for Grace and other women of her generation, such act has no place in public in Mexico City. It is as if years of protecting bodily integrity have crystallized in the flesh.

In *The Politics of Piety* (2005), Saba Mahmood discusses a model of performance that “emphasizes the sedimented and cumulative character of reiterated performances, where each performance builds on prior ones...” (Mahmood, 2001: 216). The tactic of expressing but concealing affection, as Grace’s narrative suggest, might be thought of as a practice developed over a life time. In Mahmood’s model, such a practice would take time to shift. As she suggests in relation to change of practices: “one would literally have to retutor the body to behave in a different way in order to destabilize or disrupt the solidity of norms” (Mahmood, 2001: 216). While important discursive changes on same-

sex sexualities have taken place in Mexico City, as recent debates on same-sex marriage, anti-discrimination laws and a queer-friendly city demonstrate, these do not equally interact with the practices of all Mexico City's inhabitants.

The terror of homophobia marks the body, this perishable archive, and impedes leaving the past behind. Studies on trauma and memory have proposed for decades that trauma is ever lived in the present. In Lyotard's words: "This time without diachrony where the present is the past and where the past is always presence" (1990: 16). I do not (only) refer here to the individual experience of trauma, but rather to approaches that refer to memory and trauma as collective (Halbwach 1950) and inscribed in social and political processes (Augé 2004, Argenti and Schramm 2010). While the bars of the 1980s have come and gone without leaving any visible traces on the buildings where they "lived," bodies carry history "within." While the city forgets, the body remembers.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I discussed the ways in which two generations of women mapped queer Mexico City. I mainly concentrated on places in the late 1970s and early 1980s, in contrast with places that existed in 2009-2010. Places were not only identified in terms of their geographical location, but also different places of *el ambiente* are mapped in terms of gender, class and age. This network of places constituted of cafés, bars, activist houses, support groups, etc. was key to community formation. At the same time, the multiple intimate relations based on friendship, love, erotic attraction and rivalry

sustained the networks of *el ambiente*. The succession of places through time, leads to question if generational cohorts could be thought in terms of the different maps they identified through time. While *el ambiente* continued to be divided in terms of social class, the sites visited by women in the 1970s differed from the ones women in 2009-2010 went to in terms of their geographical location and visibility. Women of various generational cohorts also visited places of *el ambiente*, which had not been the case in the past. While knowledge transmitted in peer-to-peer interaction certainly takes place through an embodied repertoire, I questioned how knowledge is transmitted intergenerationally in *el ambiente*, precisely because of the fact that different generations tend to interact in different places and the existence of a thin archive. I conclude the chapter examining the place of same-sex public affection in public spaces. Despite numerous social, cultural and legislative changes relating to same-sex sexuality in Mexico City, women of different generations had different attitudes in terms of their public affection practices. Bodies that had been disciplined for years to conceal their gestures of affection continued the same practices. While place of *el ambiente* succeeded one another, it is as if the homophobic atmosphere had been memorized by bodies. Are younger generations creating new corporeal memories?

## EPILOGUE

### 1.

It is July 2012, one year and 10 months after I left fieldwork. Life has worked in such a way that the day after I “concluded” this dissertation, I am scheduled to travel to Mexico City. This was not consciously planned. I question what it means to have written 260 pages, without ever setting my feet in Mexico and coming back the day this has been completed. It is like looking at the other side of the mirror, and asking the city face to face if my souvenirs and notes find echo in present-day Mexico City.

When I started writing an epilogue in my room in Brooklyn, it began with something like this: “In retrospect the subject of this dissertation is greatly symptomatic of the events the country lived in 2010.” I had in mind the reform on marriage and the ways in which same-sex intimacy was at the center of many debates in the public sphere in Mexico. Today, as I am sitting in a café in Coyoacán, I read in the paper that there have been three *marchas* to protest the result of the 2012 elections. The PRI will soon be back in power, after an absence of twelve years. In Egypt, in Spain, in the US, young people have been at the forefront of transformative movements in these past two years. It is no different in Mexico, where the student led movement “yo soy #132” is protesting the election results.

My friend Luisa, where I am staying at for two days, is enraged about the events surrounding the elections. She feels like this future presidency is an imposition. I already knew how she felt, as half of her posts on Facebook have been about a possible electoral fraud. She picked me up at metro Oceania, where I remember meeting with her 12 years ago. We have not seen each other in two years, and within 3 minutes she tells me that her

world has entirely changed. Luisa and her partner have lost the chicken stall they owned at the market. They have moved three times from the apartment they had, to El Estado de México, to Yvonne's parent's house, to an apartment in a *vecindad*, right next to Luisa's mother and sister. It has been a rough two years and the situation has created great strain in her relationship with Yvonne. They have been together for seven years, but lately their relationship has barely been surviving. I can feel the tension between them as I am sitting at their kitchen table. Their dog softens the mood of the evening. Luisa has changed jobs three times in the past two years, and Yvonne worked at a job at some point and now stays at home. She makes tea and coffee for Luisa and I, while I examine the picture of the virgin de Guadalupe on the wall, right next to Pope John Paul II. I brought them bread, which they keep for breakfast tomorrow. Luisa's mother is getting older and keeps forgetting about everything. She says that at least, she is near her mother in case she needs some help. When Luisa told me she had returned to live next to her mother's place, I knew that it meant they had had some financial or family difficulties.

Security is so volatile in Mexico. One day rolling on gold, the next living back in the old apartment, where old ghosts haunt the walls. I question how many of my words can bring solace to my friend's soul. I could have taken the plane, given her a huge embrace and sooth away her pain for a minute or two. I do not know if any of my words will ever have such power. I do not know if any of my words will ever count beyond the pages of this dissertation. I do not know what any of my words really means in the lives of Luisa or Monse, who are opening their doors to me this week. I tell Luisa that she appears somewhere in the dissertation that I quote her talking about what she learned on

friendship from her father. She shyly laughs, but asks no more questions about my work for tonight. She wants to know if I am dating anyone and asks me many questions on this issue that has been rather empty in my life since I left the field. Still, she gets some stories about failed attempts, which make her laugh a lot. She offers me fruit and more tea and talks about her dog, a hairless *xoloescüinckle* that looks at me timidly.

## 2.

Luisa ended work around 8pm. My flight arrived in Mexico City at 1pm. I had to wait many hours around the city, before she could pick me up to make it to her apartment. I tried of thinking of an area of the city, where I would feel relatively safe to walk around with my suitcase and bag. I decide to go have lunch at a café I loved in Coyoacán. I sat next to a stranger who is there by herself at the bar next to me. I hear her say that she left her suitcase at a store, and that today she is on the streets until her friend comes home from work. I tell her that I did not mean to listen to her conversation, but that I was in a similar situation, as I point to my bags. We laugh and begin talking about what we are doing in Mexico City today. She is from Jalapa, Veracruz and lived in Mexico City for about 7 years. As I tell her my story. She says that she was going to marry a man from New York City, who left her life without giving her any explanation. She is still hurt by his sudden disappearance seven months ago. I tell her of an *ex-novia* and do not see her frown at all when I use the term *novia*, in the feminine form. At the table right behind us, I see two women in their 20s holding hands and kissing. No one seems bothered by their display of public affection. It is raining hard so I order another coffee and continue talking with Iliana. Within half an hour she tells me that she once

dated a woman. She says that she never felt the need to label herself. She says: “How great that I fell in love. It did not matter to me that she was a woman.” Her girlfriend however felt uneasy with herself and did not want to be too public about their relationship. Iliana says that she ended it because her girlfriend behaved “*como un macho*/like a macho.” She would act jealous if Iliana wore attractive clothes on the street and felt the obligation to “*satisfacerla*/ satisfy her” in bed. Iliana said about her “*¿de qué rancho vienes?*”/from with ranch are you from?” Her words implied that her ex had provincial ideas about relationships, perhaps opposing it to a queer cosmopolitan egalitarian ideal.

### 3.

I am writing about their lives in their apartment. I feel a bit uneasy about it. Now I remember that it is always easier to write ethnography in the distance. This distance is created through time, writing elsewhere, but also importantly through the apparent distance of the notes, newspaper articles, and the recorded interviews. I’ve got to remember: my work is just about real lives lived in flesh and blood. It’s alive. It’s so easy to forget about it and melt into text. A few months ago, at a talk given at CLAGS in November 2011, Gayle Rubin reminded queer studies scholars how important social science research was, because otherwise we begin to produce work that is completely disconnected from the everyday lives of the people we write about. Research becomes about the commentary of the text, of the text, of the text, of the text... without ever returning to its original source. I say, yes Gayle, but today I see how easy it is to hide behind our notes and our recordings that have become “things” at their turn. At times, so

far from the flesh and bones of the women and their lives we write about. Those women who will respond back to you, ignore your work, or look right above your shoulder as you are typing these words.

#### 4.

I've been in Mexico City for two days now. I am always surprised about how the city takes me in so quickly in its dynamic life. Yesterday, Luisa and I talked some more about my research. She told me that she did not understand the people who only wanted to hang out in queer spaces. "This is year 2012," she said. "*Las cosas han cambiado/* things have changed," she adds. I tell her that my dissertation questions if things have changed for women participating in queer spaces. I explain to her that my oldest interviewees never hung out in queer spaces, because they did not know of their existence. They dated women, but because of the circumstances at the time, they were very discreet about their relationships. In comparison with the stories of oldest informants, this is a very different situation than the one Luisa and Yvonne enjoy, being recognized as a couple by their family and neighbors. It is however not impossible that a few women in the past lived in a similar situation and I know that some of my interviewees were not open about their relationships. So, how have the social organization, discourses and practices of intimacy shifted for women participating in queer communities in Mexico City since the 1960s?

In terms of broader social trends, it is clear that same-sex intimacy became part of debates in the public sphere in 2009-2010. As many activists suggested, achieving

visibility is in their perspective a gain since their lives cannot simply be effaced by authorities. The sexual diversity movement has achieved institutionalizing some of their demands through public institutions. These events occur at a moment when diverse countries across the Americas have been implementing laws and policies favoring LGBT rights. This takes place, at a historical moment when the free and protected queer body acquires a curious symbolic currency to mark “advanced” nations from “retrograde” ones, in Western terms. In an institutional sense change is undeniable in Mexico City. We must however remember the words of activist Rosalinda Ávila concerning the ways in which abortion has recently been criminalized in 18 Mexican States: “*Lo que si creo es que nosotras lo que aprendimos las feministas es lo siguiente: los avances al pasado no son para siempre/ what we, feminists, have learned is the following: progress made in the past is not forever.*” Her words suggest that a teleological vision of change is questionable and detrimental to achieve profound transformation.

Looking at the 40 interviews I completed, I have no doubts that the women of the two older generations I interviewed were expected to marry and form a family. Working was acceptable, but small careers that would not take them away from family life were more suitable for women. This “obligatory” reproductive destiny attached their lives trajectories more deeply to heterosexuality. While these ideas remain in Mexican society, it seems that younger women were often encouraged to develop a career, they had the flexibility of marrying later and the social and cultural awareness that some women might be romantically or sexually attracted towards other women was more widespread. Parts of their lives developed at a moment when the obligatory link between sexual and

romantic relationships and reproduction was being questioned, not only in *el ambiente*, but in broader Mexican society.

There have been moments in time when women have felt the need to question and theorize their practices. In the past, polyamorous relations between women questioned compulsory heterosexuality and the standards of double morality that attached women's sexuality with reproduction. This theorization took place at the heart of what Elrolloes labeled as "the sexual revolution." This developed after the 1968 student uprising, from which new urban social movements developed. In 2009-2010 polyamory challenged the same issues, but also questioned the possibility for women to organize intimate relationships via other means than the monogamous couple. It is not surprising that polyamorous movements rise at a moment in which same-sex marriage is being legislated in various cities, states and countries across the Americas. There is no doubt that women have practiced polyamory throughout time, however its theorization largely emerges in conversation with discourses on intimacy, sexuality and relationships of the time.

## 5.

This dissertation questioned the transformation of intimacy in the lives of three generations of women participating in *el ambiente* in Mexico City, at a moment in which important debates on sexual citizenship have been taking place. I suggested that if we are truly to understand queer lives in Latin America, it is imperative to engage with the discourses on intimacy produced through the State and other institutional actors and the ways in which these are experienced, rather than center our analysis on ontological

questions as research on same-sex sexuality in Latin America and the Caribbean has continuously generated.

In chapter 1, I explored the ways in which the emergence of debates on sexual citizenship connects with the shift from *mestizaje* to multiculturalism, in Mexican nationalism. I also situated these discussions within global trends that are beginning to address sexual and gender identity rights. Anti-discrimination laws, same-sex unions and marriage began taking place in the mid-1990s in Mexico City. A few decades before almost no laws made reference to same-sex sexuality.

Yet, as I discuss in Chapter 2, subject positions for women who practice sex with women existed in various communities. Women of the two oldest generations sometimes heard of *tortilleras* or *marimachas* which were understood differently than the figure of the homosexual, in their communities prior to the 80s. Other figures such as *la lesbiana* or *la bisexual*, which come from the medical lexicon, were later popularized by the LGBTTTTI movement with a liberatory set of meanings. Other terms such as *de ambiente* and *la diversidad sexual* tend to point to normative and non-normative sexualities, without clinging to particular identities. In chapter 2, I examined these different subject positions that have existed through time in Mexico for women practicing sex with women from the 1960s until today.

I begin chapter 3, by looking at the ways in which interviewees defined intimacy as a personal space that has the potential to enable connections. Through this spatial metaphor, I explore diverse affective ties and practices that were related to intimacy in

interviews, including love, sexuality and friendship. I situate these forms of relating within a context in which the Reform on marriage was being discussed. Oppositional discourses on polyamory also circulated in *el ambiente*, at the time of fieldwork, questioning the imaginary of the monogamous same-sex couple. Debates on polyamory in *el ambiente* opened reflections on the possibility of redefining love and relationships, including friendship. The chapter examines how women taking part in *el ambiente* are reconfiguring their views and practices on intimacy in the context.

Finally, chapter 6 takes us back to some of the places in which these forms of intimate relations are developed. It engages with questions that grapple with the notion of generation and space. More particularly, I look at the ways in which two generations of women have mapped queer Mexico City. While I think of queer spaces through the notion of *el ambiente*, more broadly than places themselves, their existence is key to community formation. Importantly, the cafés, bars, activist groups and other places have appeared and disappeared over the years, without leaving traces of their passage on the city. Observing the different generational maps, I suggest that a relationship to ephemeral places constitutes groups of women as generations. I ultimately end the dissertation questioning the possibilities for intergenerational knowledge transmission in *el ambiente*. What does operating without an archive and scarce places of interaction mean for community formation and its memory?

## 6.

This morning I “moved” to Monse’s house for two days. She just came back from the hospital where she spent 12 days. She had a rough year. Her mother and father passed away. Her partner Miriam left her. Her friend Natalia went with her to the hospital this morning to pay the bills. Still, there is vitality in her voice and she says that she cannot wait to go back to work. She tells me that Deborah is in San Francisco and she has fallen in love with some *gringo*. I apologize for not letting her know earlier that I was in Mexico. I tell her that I have been finishing the dissertation in the past few weeks and I have to answer many late emails. She says that she remembered I was coming this summer, but did not know exactly when. Her neighborhood located a few blocks down Sonora market is crowded and full of loud noises during the day. At night, only a few ghosts shake the house. I feel so far from the Southern part of Mexico City where I lived during fieldwork. I ask her about the punching ball in her room. She gives me a boxing lesson. She puts gloves on my hands and soon I am playing with the punching ball, concentrating on its fast movement and letting go off the crowded day I had. She reads my mind when she says that she feels that the punching ball is very relaxing. We move to the kitchen to have tea and talk about the earthquake last month. She says that she is grateful that nothing fell apart in the city. The paint on the walls of her house is peeling as always.

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**APPENDIX 1**  
**INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE – SPANISH**

**Cuestionario**  
**Preguntas sobre intimidades queer**

**Información**

Fecha:

Lugar:

No.

- Sexo:

- ¿Que edad tienes?

- ¿Cuál es el último nivel que completaste en la escuela?

- ¿Practicas una religión? ¿Cuál?

- ¿Tu familia de origen practica una religión, cuál?

- ¿Cuál es tu nacionalidad?

- ¿Con qué grupo étnico te identificas?

- ¿Cuál es tu estado civil?

- ¿Con quién vives?

- ¿Cuál es tu ocupación?

- ¿Cuál es la ocupación de tu a) padre b) madre c) otro d) pareja (si pertinente)

- ¿Tienes que aportar un ingreso a casa?

- (SI) ¿Qué porcentaje de tu salario?

- ¿Cuantas horas trabajas por semana?

- ¿Tienes hermanos/hermanas? ¿Cuántos?

- ¿Con qué clase social te identificas?

- ¿Has vivido siempre en la ciudad de México?

- (Si no) ¿Dónde?

- ¿En qué colonia vives?

- ¿Cómo es tu colonia?

### **Primeras preguntas**

- ¿Tu piensas que era diferente ser mujer en México una generación anterior?

- ¿Cumples con las expectativas de tu familia como mujer?

### **Sociedad Mexicana- Familia de origen**

- ¿Cómo es la familia en la que creciste?

- En casa: ¿Qué recuerdas que te haya dicho tu familia acerca de esos temas?:

a) del noviazgo b) del amor c) de la amistad d) ser mujer d) de los hombres e) del sexo f) de la homosexualidad

- ¿Piensas que los temas antes mencionados fueron discutidos en :

- la escuela

- los medios de comunicación

- ¿Piensas que el amor, la sexualidad, el deseo entre mujeres es discutido abiertamente en la sociedad mexicana?

### **Identidades sexuales**

- ¿Te atraen los hombres románticamente o sexualmente?

- ¿Te atraen las mujeres románticamente o sexualmente?

- ¿Qué palabras utilizas para describir tu preferencia o identidad sexual?¿Porqué?

- ¿Recuerdas cuándo empezaste a utilizar estas palabras?

- ¿Alguien sabe de tu preferencia sexual?

- ¿Te cuesta todavía hablar con alguien o en algún espacio de tu preferencia sexual?

- ¿Tuviste un proceso de aceptación de tu preferencia sexual? ¿Cómo fue?

- ¿Puedes identificar una persona que es lesbiana o gay? ¿Cómo?

### **Amistades**

- Háblame de tus amistades? (tienes amigas/os cercanos, círculos de amistades, etc.)

- ¿Tienes muchas/os amigas/os LGBT? ¿Hombres o mujeres?

- ¿Cómo los conociste?

- ¿Dónde se ven generalmente o en que lugares están?

- ¿Cuál es el rol de la amistad en tu vida?

- ¿Hay una diferencia cuando estas con amigas/os LGBT, a cuando estas con otros amigas/os?

- ¿Tu familia conoce tus amigas/os LGBT?

### **Amor y relaciones**

- ¿Qué es la intimidad para ti?

- ¿Te has enamorado?

- ¿Cómo lo sabes?

- ¿Crees en el amor?

- ¿En cuántas relaciones formales has estado (hombre/mujeres)?

Si pertinente:

- ¿Cómo conociste a tu primera novia?

- ¿Cuéntame cómo fue la relación?(A donde iban, cómo te sentías, qué cambios trajo a tu vida, cómo fue con tu familia, amigos, de ser el caso cómo fue decayendo, sigue en tu vida, etc)

Si pertinente:

- ¿Cómo conociste a tu novia actual? (o última novia).

- ¿Cuéntame cómo fue la relación?(A donde iban, cómo te sentías, qué cambios trajo a tu vida, cómo fue con tu familia, amigos, etc. de ser el caso cómo fue decayendo, sigue en tu vida...)

Si pertinente:

- ¿Cual ha sido la relación más importante en la que has estado?
- ¿Cómo fue la relación?( A donde iban, cómo te sentías, qué cambios trajo a tu vida, cómo fue con tu familia, amigos, etc. de ser el caso cómo fue decayendo, sigue en tu vida...)
- ¿Qué buscas en una pareja?
- ¿Qué piensas de la monogamia y del poliamor?
- ¿Alguna vez haz tenido miedo de quedarte sola?
- ¿Haz estado en una relación no formal, que te marcó o fue importante?

### **Casamiento y Sociedades de Convivencia**

- ¿Has oído de la legalización de las bodas entre personas de mismo sexo?
  - ¿Cómo te parecen que han reaccionado a) los habitantes de la ciudad?
  - ¿Piensas que esto traerá algún cambio social? Porqué?
  - ¿Alguna vez haz celebrado un matrimonio o una unión (bajo la ley on no)?
  - ¿Porqué decidiste casarte?
  - ¿Celebraste una ceremonia? (Cuéntame)
  - ¿Cambiaste de vivienda después de la unión?
  - ¿La relación con tu familia cambió después de la unión?
  - ¿La relación con tus amigos cambió después de la unión?
  - ¿La relación de pareja cambió después de la unión?
  - ¿Has tomado ventaja de beneficios sociales? ¿Cuáles?
- (si ha vivido con pareja: )
- Cómo se dividen las tareas en casa?
  - ¿Han pensado en tener o adoptar hijos?

### **Sexualidad y deseos**

- ¿Qué tipo de mujeres te gustan?
- ¿Has tenido relaciones sexuales? (hombres/mujeres)
- ¿A partir de qué edad (hombres/mujeres)?
- ¿Qué significan las relaciones sexuales para ti?
- ¿Has practicado sexo casual?
- ¿Qué piensas del sexo casual?

### **Comunidad y espacios queer**

- ¿Vas a eventos o lugares “de ambiente”?
- ¿Cuáles?
- ¿Qué tan seguido?
- ¿Cuándo y donde fuiste a un lugar “del ambiente” por primera vez?
- ¿Cómo fue?
- ¿Ha cambiado el ambiente desde que empezaste a participar en éste?
- ¿Te gusta el ambiente y porqué?
- ¿Ha cambiado algo el estar en contacto con el ambiente?
- Si me tuvieras que dar un tour “del ambiente”, ¿a dónde me llevarías y porqué?
- ¿Qué partes de la ciudad asocias con el ambiente y porqué?
- ¿Cuáles nunca asociarías con el ambiente? (o encuales no andarias con tu pareja de la mano?)
- ¿Has participado en el activismo LGBT? ¿De qué tipo?
- ¿Va gente de diversos estratos económicos al ambiente?
- ¿Es diferente el ambiente para los hombres y las mujeres que participant en éste?
- ¿Qué es un espacio lésbico?

- ¿Qué caracteriza el ambiente en México?

### **Producciones Culturales**

- ¿Hay películas o programas de tele que identificarías como representativos de la intimidad lésbica? ¿Cuáles?

- ¿los consumes?

- ¿Hay libros o revistas que identificarías como representativos de la intimidad lesbica? ¿Cuáles?

- ¿los consumes?

- ¿Visitad sitios Webs lésbicos o chats? ¿Cuáles?

### **Conclusión**

- ¿Hay otra cosa que quisieras comentar?

**APPENDIX 2**  
**INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE - ENGLISH**

**Questionnaire on Queer Intimacies**

**Fact sheet**

Date:

Place:

No.

- Sex:

- Age:

- What is the last year of school you completed?

- Do you practice religion? Which one?

- Does your family practise religion? Which one?

- What is your nationality?

- How do you identify yourself ethnically?

- What is your marital status?

- Who do you live with?

- What is your occupation?

- What is the occupation of your a) father b) mother c) or other d) partner (if applies)

- Do you have siblings? How many?

- Do you provide an economic contribution to your household?

- (Yes) Which percentage?

- How many hours per week do you work?

- With which social class do you identify? Why?

- Have you always lived in Mexico City?

- If not, Where?
- In what neighbourhood do you live in?
- How would you describe your neighbourhood?

### **Opening Questions**

- Do you believe that it was different to be a woman in Mexico one generation ago?
- As a woman, do you fulfill the expectations your family has of you?

### **Mexican Society- Family of origin**

- What is the family you grew up in like?
- What did the family you grew up in tell you about:
  - a) dating b) love c) to be a woman d) men e) sex f) homosexuality
- Do you think that these issues were discussed in:
  - School
  - The media
- Do you think that sexuality, desire between women and is openly discussed in Mexican society?

### **Sexual Identities**

- Are you attracted to men romantically and/or sexually?
- Are you attracted to women romantically and/or sexually?
- Which words do you use to describe your sexuality (sexual preference) and why?
- Do you remember when you started using these words?
- Does anyone know of your sexual preference?
- Do you feel it is still difficult for you to speak of your sexual preference with some people or in certain spaces?
- Did you live a process of acceptance of your sexual preference? What was it like?
- Can you identify a person who is gay or lesbian? How?

### **Friendships**

- Talk to me about your friends? (where do you know them from, what are they like?)
- Do you have many LGBT friends? Men or women?
- How did you meet them?
- Do you have a group of LGBT friends with whom you are in contact regularly?
- Where do you usually meet with them and what kinds of activities do you do?
- What is the role of friendship in your life?
- Is it different when you are with LGBT friends, compared with other friends? In which ways?
- Does your family know your LGBT friends?

### **Love and relationships**

- What is intimacy for you?
- Have you ever been in love?
- How did you know?
- Do you believe in love?
- How many formal relationships have you been into (men/women)?

If yes:

- How did you meet your girlfriend?
- What has it been like?(Where did you go, how did you feel, what changes did it bring to your life, how was it with the families, friends, etc.)

If yes:

- What has been the most important relationship in which you have been?
- What has it been like?(Where did you go, how did you feel, what changes did it bring to your life, how was it with the families, friends, etc.)
- What do you look for in a partner?
- What do you think of monogamy? And poliamory?

- Have you ever feared staying by yourself?
- Have you ever been in an informal relationship, which was important to you?

### **Same-sex Marriage and Sociedades de Convivencia**

- Are you familiar with recent changes in the Civil Code that have given place to the legalization of same-sex marriage?
- How do you feel that Mexico City inhabitants have reacted to this change?
- Do you think that this will bring any kind of social change? Why?
- Have you ever celebrated a union or marriage? (legal or not)?
- Why did you decide to get married?
- Did you celebrate a ceremony? (tell me about it)
- Did your living situation change after the union?
- Did your relationship with your family change after marriage?
- Did your relationship with your friends change after marriage?
- Did your relationship with your spouse change after marriage?
- Have you taken advantage of specific benefits? Which ones?
- [If living with partner] How do you divide tasks at home?
- Have you thought of having or adopting children?

### **Sexuality and desire**

- Which kind of women are you usually attracted to?
- Have you ever had sexual relations? (men/women)
- From which age (men/women)?
- What do sexual relations mean to you?
- Have you ever practiced casual sex?
- What do you think of casual sex?

### **Queer community**

- Do you go to places or events “de ambiente”?
- If yes, which ones?
- When and where did you go to “el ambiente” for the first time?
- What was it like?
- Has the ambiente changed since you began taking part in it?
- If yes, in which ways?
- Do you like the ambiente and why?
- Has being in contact with el ambiente changed anything in your life?
- If you had to give me a tour of “el ambiente”, where would you take me and why, so I can get a better idea of “el ambiente”?
- Which parts of the city do you associate with the ambiente and why?
- Are there parts of town where you would not hold hands with your partner on the street?
- Have you ever participated in LGBT activism? What kind?
- Do people of different socioeconomic status take part in el ambiente?
- Is el ambiente different for men than women who take part in it and in which ways?
- What is a lesbian space?

### **Cultural production in el ambiente and “de ambiente**

- Are there movies or TV programs that you would identify as representative of lesbian intimacy?
- If yes, which ones and why?
- Are there books or magazines that you would identify as representative of lesbian intimacy?
- If yes, which ones and why?

Do you visit lesbian websites or chats regularly? Which ones?

**Conclusion**

- Is there anything else that you consider important to mention concerning this interview that we have not discussed yet?

### APPENDIX 3

[http://www.notiese.org/notiese.php?ctn\\_id=4037](http://www.notiese.org/notiese.php?ctn_id=4037)

#### Discurso Oficial de la XXXII Marcha del Orgullo LGBTTTI

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México DF, junio 28 de 2010.

Bienvenidas y bienvenidos a esta Marcha del Bicentenario, a esta Marcha del Orgullo, a esta celebración para las libertades, para la independencia, para las reformas y las revoluciones sexuales que hoy es necesario reivindicar.

Hace 200 años, en México y toda América, hubo quienes se plantearon que tenían derechos y sacaron de la clandestinidad y de la opresión esa dignidad para exigir igualdad para apropiarse de su territorio.

Eso es también lo que nos convoca hoy aquí. Lo mismo que nos convocó desde hace 32 años. Se dice fácil, pero atreverse a desafiar a la ignorancia, que se siente autoridad absoluta, universal, inmutable e infinita, requiere de muchas voces que digan ¡ya basta!

México, después de 200 años, sigue siendo un país profundamente desigual, profundamente discriminatorio. Con una historia fundada en la exclusión, en el pensamiento único, en la exclusión de las diferencias.

Hoy debemos decir que nosotras y nosotros también estuvimos en las luchas de Independencia, de la Reforma y en la Revolución Mexicana, porque este país no es solo un país de y para los heterosexuales, aquí convivimos muchas ciudadanías, somos diversos quienes habitamos la Nación. El autoritarismo del garrote, debe abrirle paso a la institucionalidad democrática y el Estado de Derecho, el movimiento Lésbico, Gay, Bisexual, Transgénero, Travesti, Transexual e Intersexual (LGBTTTI) se inscribe en ese contexto.

Hoy estamos aquí para reafirmar que nuestros derechos, no inician, ni terminan con la cuestión del matrimonio, y mucho menos con del idea de matrimonio que hasta hoy se ha fabricado. Que nuestros derechos van más allá, son más, mucho más que eso, significa la convicción de que nadie más debe decidir por nosotras y nosotros, que somos nosotras y nosotros quienes decidimos de forma libre, responsable y soberana de qué forma, con quién y cómo debemos vivir o amar. No nos vamos a conformar con ciudadanía a medias, de segunda clase, simplemente porque no aceptamos esa democracia, que no lo es, y que se nos quiere vender.

Aquí y ahora el reclamo para que se reconozca nuestro derecho al matrimonio sin discriminación, significa rechazar los retazos que algunos, los de siempre, nos quieren imponer, no sólo en el ámbito simbólico, sino también en el plano del acceso a las

oportunidades y los derechos, en este caso, a esa institución llamada matrimonio, que los liberales del siglo XIX le arrebataron a las instituciones eclesiásticas de la Iglesia en nuestro país, para convertirlo en un acto civil, que ahora requiere volverse realmente un acto de ejercicio de plena ciudadanía.

Nuestra demanda de estos tiempos, pone a prueba el discurso democrático, colocando a las instituciones de justicia frente al reto de dar el siguiente paso al siglo XXI. No podemos aceptar ni un retroceso más, no podemos claudicar permitiendo el engaño de quienes pretenden restarnos derechos, como el de adopción, que por cierto ya teníamos. No podemos admitir un supuesto avance para arribar de forma absurda, al mismo lugar.

No vamos a aceptar un oscuro pacto, para cubrir las apariencias de pluralidad y llenar los formularios del caduco clientelismo o la inadmisible sumisión. Que quede claro, no lo vamos a permitir. Llegamos nuevamente como iguales, nuestros afectos y vidas valen tanto como las demás.

Nuestras familias están aquí, salimos al espacio público para que todo el mundo constate, se entere y tome nota del testimonio de que nuestros hijos e hijas también se sienten libres, son queridos y se reconocen iguales en dignidad, formando parte de las familias en plural, somos distintos porque nuestros lazos han sido establecidos, a través de la profunda convicción de que, lo que es verdaderamente importante y debe prevalecer es el amor, el apoyo y el cuidado mutuo y de que lo que realmente hay que esconder es la vergüenza de vivir en un país homofóbico, lesbofóbico, transfóbico.

Porque así hay que nombrar a las cosas, porque no le tenemos miedo a las palabras. Coincidimos en que el decreto presidencial del pasado 17 de mayo para decretar el “Día de la Tolerancia y el Respeto a las Preferencias” invisibiliza el enorme problema social relacionado con la homofobia e ignora la lucha que las organizaciones de la sociedad civil hemos desarrollado desde hace 8 años para que se declare el Día Nacional contra la Homofobia. Esta es una acción que deja ver claramente la homofobia institucionalizada desde la figura presidencial, de la que el Consejo Nacional para Prevenir la Discriminación se ha hecho cómplice.

El panorama no es fácil y nos exige estar a la altura de las circunstancias. Por ello, nos pronunciamos también en contra de las modificaciones constitucionales que han penalizado la interrupción del embarazo en el país, buscando frenar el derecho de las mujeres a decidir sobre sus cuerpos y sus vidas.

Queremos señalar asimismo que los supuestos avances en materia de no discriminación y derechos sexuales traen consigo efectos colaterales como el aumento de crímenes de odio por homofobia. De acuerdo con los resultados preliminares del Informe realizado por Letra S y la Comisión Ciudadana Contra Crímenes de Odio por Homofobia, se calcula que de 1995 a 2009 se han cometido 640 asesinatos por homofobia en el país. En el Distrito Federal se detectaron 144 crímenes, lo que coloca a esta ciudad en el primer

lugar de incidencia, aunque hay que recordar que esta cifra puede ser aún mayor, debido a la dificultad para acceder a la información que sin duda arrojaría datos en el sentido que esos crímenes han afectado en mayor medida a las entidades federativas.

La Constitución Política conjuga y resume las demandas producto de las gestas históricas y procesos políticos nacionales, y aunque necesita ponerse al día porque aún refleja importantes rezagos, es suficiente para dar cobijo a nuestro reclamo y el de nuestras familias: estamos seguros de que los ministros de la Suprema Corte de Justicia de la Nación considerarán la constitucionalidad de las leyes que nos dan cobijo.

También deben tomar en cuenta que salimos de la oscuridad que durante siglos se nos impuso. Se nos ha humillado, asesinado, excluido, ignorado, torturado, ninguneado, y por ende, nuestras familias no tienen las mismas oportunidades que las otras, las conformadas por la mamá, el papá, los hijitos, el perro con pedigree, el jardín y la mami-van.

Ha sido gracias a las fuerzas retrógradas y oscurantistas que desde jóvenes fuimos expulsados de nuestras familias, aconsejadas por el fundamentalismo religioso y político que les recomendaba excluirnos. Cuántos de nosotras y nosotros que estamos hoy aquí no fuimos negados por nuestros hermanos, o tías, o vecinos, cuando sospechaban que no éramos obedientes frente al orden social patriarcal.

Ya nos cansamos de esa historia, que más bien parece una pésima historieta. Ahora queremos dar nuestra versión aquí, desde quienes reivindicamos el derecho a la diferencia, porque distintas y distintos, pero iguales. Nos negamos a que la única llave para acceder a los derechos humanos sea el matrimonio que discrimina y a que sea éste el único derecho que se nos reconozca.

Debemos tener las mismas oportunidades de acceder al derecho al trabajo, al ingreso a la salud y a la seguridad social, a la educación, a la cultura, a la alimentación, al agua, a que se nos respete nuestra vida privada, a que la policía no nos veje, amedrente o torture, además de una larga lista de derechos frente a los cuales no vamos a descansar hasta pensamos ejercer a plenitud.

Hacemos nuestra a la ciudad, como hacemos nuestros, a nuestros cuerpos y afectos. Esta magnífica ciudad que hoy se embarga de tristeza por la partida de quien siempre apoyó la causa LGBTTTTI, nuestro entrañable Monsiváis. Monsi, sabemos que sigues con nosotras y nosotros, donde quiera que estés.

Nuestras batallas culturales las hemos dado siempre en un marco de diálogo respetuoso, y ahora, es necesario que la Suprema Corte de Justicia de la Nación refrende que el marco jurídico en el Distrito Federal, representa un avance que ya no se podrá detener en otros puntos del país. Los ministros de la Corte deben considerar que nuestras vidas y la de nuestros hijos e hijas, no son una hipótesis jurídica, ni un mero supuesto legal, o una ficción de alguna mente truculenta. No, nuestras familias ya están instaladas en la

realidad de este país desde hace mucho tiempo, y es la ley la que debe encargarse de asegurar la erradicación de la discriminación y garantizar la igualdad de todas y todos.

Hoy el mundo admite, incluida la Convención Internacional por los Derechos del Niño, que no hay solo una forma o modo de familia, y que los y las niñas merecen ser amados y cuidados, sin discriminación de ninguna índole.

Nada nos ha sido regalado ni por la casualidad histórica, ni por la benevolencia partidista o gubernamental. Han sido 32 años de salir a la calle, de reorganizarnos y lograr ser cada día mejores, sabiendo que cada día también somos más. Esta marcha fue atrayendo incluso a familias bugas que se vienen a sumar con simpatía. Esto ratifica lo que las encuestas de las empresas Mitofsky y de María de las Heras han anotado, que un poco más de la mitad de la población está de acuerdo con el reconocimiento jurídico de nuestros derechos. Esa también es una realidad que los y las ministras deberán sopesar. El interés superior de las niñas y niños también es nuestro, está aquí, está de nuestro lado.

En este marco del Día Mundial de la lucha LGBTTTTI, llegamos de todos los rincones del país, incluso de aquellos donde la persecución de la ultraderecha es feroz, para demostrar nuestro orgullo y nuestra disidencia sexo afectiva e identitaria. Aquí están presentes Jalisco, Nuevo León, Coahuila, Guerrero, Tabasco, Michoacán, Yucatán...

Tenemos la absoluta seguridad de que en las heroicas luchas que edificaron este país hubo muchas personas como las que hoy nos atrevemos a salir de la clandestinidad cultural. Imposible ignorar a Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, la décima musa y hermoso ejemplo de fortaleza y lucha por el amor y derecho al conocimiento, a la educación para las mujeres; cómo olvidar a esa inteligencia que era soledad en llamas. Cómo olvidar a Salvador Novo, agudo cronista, de quien hay que celebrar el ingenio y mordacidad, como un hombre que se atrevía a mostrar su homosexualidad.

Es momento de hablar de Frida Kahlo, esa pintora bisexual que dejó su intensa vida grabada para siempre en sus lienzos. Qué mejor día que hoy, para traerlos aquí, con nosotras y nosotros para compartir su visión de la vida y de país.

Hay que sacar del olvido a la Catalina de Erazo, la Monja Alférez, quien habiendo nacido como mujer, hasta el mismo Vaticano reconoció como hombre con el nombre de Antonio. Tenemos que conocer y reconocer también a las mujeres lesbianas, como Amelio Robles Ávila, quien participó en la justa revolucionaria de 1910, donde se hizo conocer como el coronel Robles mostrando abiertamente su preferencia sexual al hacerse acompañar por Ángela Torres su compañera sentimental por más de una década.

Hay que sacar del anonimato a esos cuarenta y un desconocidos de los cuales no sabemos en la mayoría de los casos sus nombres reales, porque la ignominia los condenó al destierro, por el temible hecho de atreverse a hacer una fiesta en la que solo había hombres, una madrugada de noviembre de 1901.

Personas anónimas hay muchas, como esos 13 hombres que murieron quemados vivos por el “Santo” oficio el 6 de noviembre de 1658, junto con Cotita de la Encarnación, un mulato homosexual mexicano acusado de entregarse al vicio de yacer con otros hombres desde la edad de siete años.

El olvido ha enterrado los nombres de hombres y mujeres que en su tiempo se atrevieron a vivir de acuerdo a su propio ser, a su propio sentir. Ya fuera en la época prehispánica o colonial, en las justas independentista y revolucionaria o en el México del siglo XX, empuñando, armas o pinceles, como pensadores o artesanos, como dirigentes o como parte del pueblo, ellas y ellos han puesto de su parte, para que hoy estemos aquí. Sin duda estarían felices de ver a donde hemos llegado, y con seguridad, estarían a nuestro lado, luchando por conseguir lo mucho que aún nos hace falta.

Nos pronunciamos a favor de la lucha de los colectivos transgéneros, transexuales, travestis e intersexuales por el reconocimiento de su identidad sexogenérica. La aprobación de una legislación que ofrezca el cambio de identidad no es suficiente para avanzar en la solución de las problemáticas de este importante sector de la población, por lo que es indispensable acompañar a las legislaciones vigentes de los recursos para su difusión y aplicación.

Debemos reconocer que los colectivos trans prevalece las discriminación y el hostigamiento, situación que no cambiará hasta que se apliquen políticas públicas que les ofrezcan las oportunidades de crecimiento necesario para la integración social a la que aspiramos.

Somos un movimiento independiente que hemos tenido que enfrentar el constante intento de los partidos políticos por corporativizarnos, por cooptarnos, por tratar de apropiarse de nuestras demandas para después mercarlas como moneda de cambio por votos. Esta marcha no apoya a partidos políticos, tenemos la madurez suficiente para saber que somos diversos no solo en lo sexual, sino también en lo ideológico y lo político, por ello rechazamos cualquier intento por parte de estas instituciones de hacernos parecer como parte de su mercado electoral.

Miles de años han tenido que pasar para construir el México en el que hoy vivimos, pero no podemos darnos el lujo de esperar más tiempo para construir el México que soñamos. Es nuestra obligación el sentar hoy las bases de nuestro futuro, ese es el verdadero compromiso y esa debe ser nuestra obligación.

Hemos crecido mucho a lo largo de estos años, seguramente dicha habría en los ojos de Manuel Rodríguez Lozano, de Frida, de Juana de Asbaje si vieran este júbilo. Impresionados estarían los 41 y Cotita de la Encarnación de ver esta concentración. ¿Qué pensaría el Coronel Robles al ver lo que hemos logrado sin armas? Rememorarlos hoy es

señalar que sin ellos no hay color en la historia. El pensar en un país sin nosotras y nosotros es proyectar una nación privada de la riqueza que ofrece la diversidad.

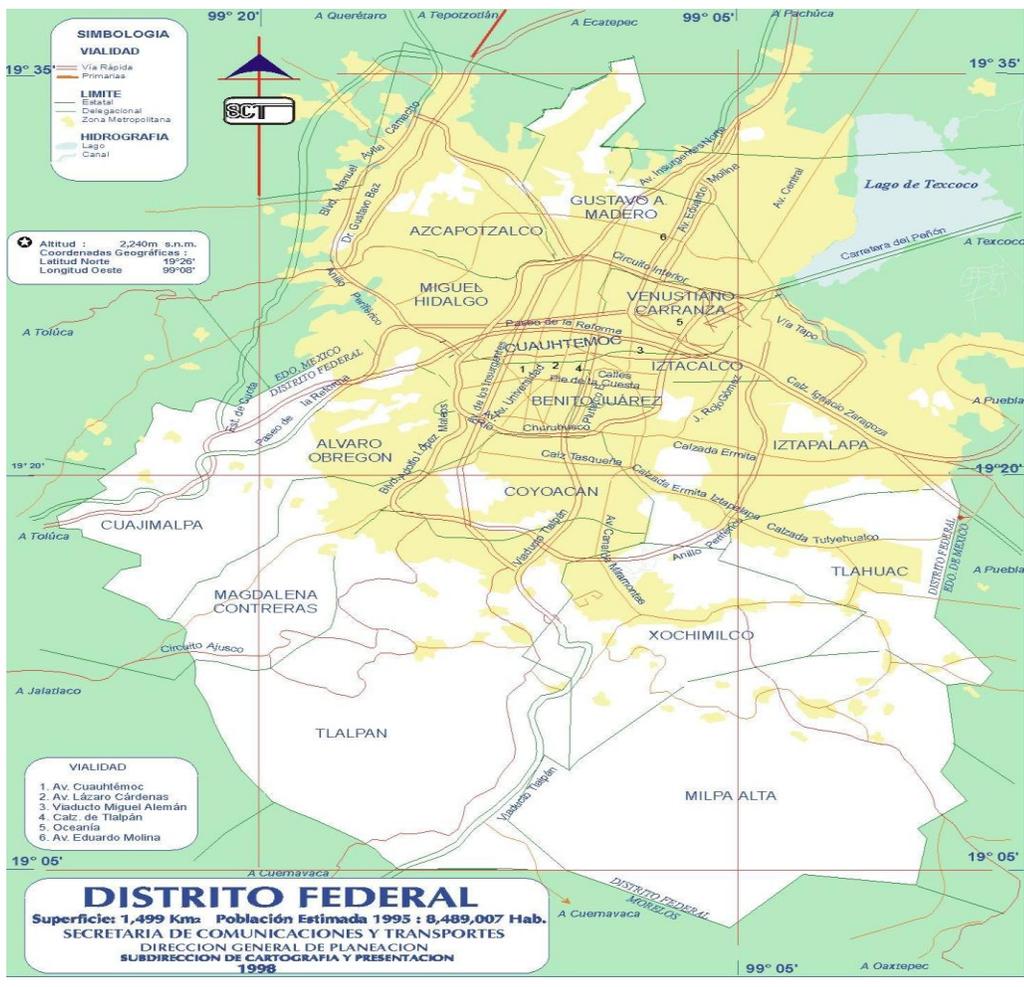
¡Que viva El Coronel Amelio Robles!  
¡Que Viva Salvador Novo!  
¡Que Viva Juana de Asbaje!  
¡Que Viva Manuel Rodríguez Lozano!  
¡Que Viva Cotita de la encarnación!  
¡Que vivan los cuarenta y uno!  
¡Que vivan los homosexuales que hicieron patria!  
¡Que vivan las lesbianas que han hecho esta nación!  
¡Que vivan las y los trans que han construido este país!  
¡Viva México!  
¡Viva Latinoamérica!

\*Discurso leído por Vicky Ponce, Fidel Negrete, Karla Miranda y Mario Arteaga, al pie del Ángel de la Independencia

México 2009. NotieSe, Agencia especializada de noticias.  
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### APPENDIX 4

## Map of the Federal District



Source: <http://www.zonu.com/fullsize1-en/2009-09-17-5125/Mexico-City-map-1998.html>

## **Curriculum Vitae**

### **Anahi Russo Garrido**

#### **EDUCATION**

**Ph.D. in Women's and Gender Studies** - Rutgers University, The State University of New Jersey, USA. (09/2006- 10/2012).

**M.A. in Social and Cultural Anthropology** - Concordia University, Montreal, Canada. (09/1999 - 09/2003).

**B.Sc. in Anthropology** - Université de Montreal, Montreal, Canada. (09/1995- 12/1997).

#### **PUBLICATIONS**

##### **Refereed journal publications**

Russo Garrido, Anahi. 2009. "El Ambiente According to Her: Gender, Class, Mexicanidad and the Cosmopolitan in Queer Mexico City" *NWSA Journal*, vol. 21, no. 3: 24-45.

Russo Garrido, Anahi. 2007. "And We Were Mexicanas": Notes on the Use of National Symbols by Lesbian Groups in Mexico" *WSQ: Activisms*, vol.35, nos. 3-4 (Fall/Winter 2007): 226-229.

##### **Refereed edited volume**

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