

# On the History of Sexuality in Modern Mexico City

## Introduction

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“On the History of Sexuality in Modern Mexico” highlights the importance of sexuality as a category of analysis and explores how sexualities in specific environments contribute to the processes of urban modernization. Why sexuality? We understand sexuality as a myriad of historically specific phenomena—rather than as a biological or natural reality—composed of cultural and performative actions that express gendered and sexual identities and desires. Expressions of sexuality manifest themselves in bodily acts and everyday social interactions, language, and behavior. They occur in social and spatial sites.<sup>1</sup> Ideas about, experiences of, and attitudes toward sexuality have shaped world views and have influenced choices about everyday life, political participation, and economic decision making. In Mexico City throughout the twentieth century, people of all social classes enacted new ideas about sexuality, including ideas about gay, lesbian, and heterosexual identities; about acceptable, desirable and transgressive feminine and masculine attitudes, behavior, and styles; and about possibilities available to them in the capital. As people in the city acted on these ideas, they also transformed them, simultaneously transforming the city around them.

In this issue, we use the term *sexuality* in the singular to indicate that we approach it as a category of analysis and theoretical tool for

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1. Jeffrey Weeks, *Lenguajes de la sexualidad* (Buenos Aires: Nueva visión, 2011); Guillermo Núñez Noriega, *¿Qué es la diversidad sexual?* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2016).

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examining its changing historical manifestations. This does not mean that we think of sexuality as a unitary or universal reality. On the contrary, our aim here is to tell stories that express specific sexualities, that is, identities, bodily expressions, and desires that have been part of the modernization of Mexico City in the century between 1920 and the present. By using the singular noun *sexuality*, we thus adhere to the conventional use in academic scholarship that deals with the history of sexuality, while being aware that some scholars in the social sciences and humanities prefer the plural term *sexualities*.<sup>2</sup>

Examining sexuality as a historical phenomenon in Mexico City from 1920 to 2020, we connect and situate this analysis in the context of urban modernization in the capital. Mexico City's modernization began in the middle of the nineteenth century with a series of state projects intended to rationalize (in every sense of the word) the organization of urban space. The modernizing imperative of the Porfirian regime was made tangible in its public works, such as sewer systems and grand boulevards. In the decades after the revolution—and across the twentieth century—the built landscape of the capital was transformed once again by public projects and private initiatives that included the construction of new streets and new public transportation systems, new parks and plazas, new museums and monuments, new hospitals and housing, new theaters and cinemas, and entire new neighborhoods. This process of reshaping of the city in the twentieth century thus forms the backdrop for all of the articles in this volume. We investigate the social construction of sexualities in specific sites, that is, in geographical places and social spaces (as forms of leisure practices and sociabilities), and within political organizations and institutions. We explore patterns of sexual regulation and emphasize tensions and conflicts of power that arise between forces that aim to control sexuality, as well as those that contest them.

The focus on Mexico City is both intentional and strategic in nature. A growing historiography of the Mexican capital recently has uncovered a vast richness and diversity of well-documented historical

2. Jeffrey Weeks, one of the most significant social scientists and historians in the field of modern history of sexuality, uses the singular noun in the title of several of his books; for example, *El malestar de la sexualidad: Significados, mitos y sexualidades modernas* (Madrid: Talasa, 1993). The author discusses the word *sexualidad* in Weeks, *Lenguajes*, 241–42. The singular noun is also used in Robert Buffington, Etienne Lubhéid, and Donna Guy, eds., *A Global History of Sexuality in the Modern Era* (Chichester: Wiley and Blackwell, 2014) and in the *Journal of the History of Sexuality*. For the use of the plural noun, see the British journal *Sexualities*.

narratives of the city that remain to be properly analyzed.<sup>3</sup> The multiplicity of untold stories from Mexico City has inspired the contributors to this special issue to investigate histories of sexuality, beginning in the 1920s and continuing to the twenty-first century, a century in which the city has lived through a process of rapid, constant growth—growth both of the city’s territorial footprint and population.

Most of the articles presented in this special issue do not cover the entire 1920–2020 period but focus more narrowly on the years between 1920 and 1970. This was a crucial era in which Mexico City grew from six hundred thousand to three million inhabitants and strengthened its position at the political, economic, and cultural center of the nation. The research presented here is part of a wave of ongoing efforts at producing a history of sexuality of Mexico City for this crucial era, a historiography too new, as yet, to even begin to identify where the gaps in research might be. Therefore, the contributors to this volume address a range of topics to augment this emerging historiography for the 1920–70 period. These include Gabriela Cano’s research on bohemian parties as spaces of gender and sexual diversity in the 1920s; Sofía Crespo Reyes and Pamela Fuentes’s work on morality campaigns—led at times by Catholic organizations and at others by public health bureaucracies—intended to purify prostitutes’ bodies and souls; Luis de Pablo Hammeken’s meditation on the homophobia faced by Miguel de Molina and Adolfo Salazar when the Spanish Civil War left them exiled in Mexico City; and Nichole Sanders’s scholarship on morality campaigns conducted by Acción Católica.

Writing on masculine sexual practices in movie theaters, Anne Rubenstein also bases her analysis in the 1920–70 period but moves beyond it to the present day in order to clarify long-term continuities, as well as changes in the uses of cinemas as sexual spaces and in

3. Among many others, see Susie Porter, *From Angel to Office Worker: Middle-Class and Female Consciousness in Mexico, 1890–1950* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018); Pablo Piccato, *A History of Infamy: Crime, Truth, and Justice in Mexico* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017); Sebastián Rivera Mir, *Militantes de la izquierda latinoamericana, 1920–1934* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2018); Katherine A. Sloan, *Death in the City: Suicide and the Social Imaginary in Modern Mexico* (Oakland: University of California, 2017); Ariel Rodríguez Kuri, ed., *Historia política de la ciudad de México* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2012); Diego Pulido, *¡A su salud! Sociabilidades, libaciones y prácticas populares en la Ciudad de México a principios del siglo XX* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2014); and Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *I Speak of the City: Mexico City at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

masculine identities. Similarly, José Ignacio Lanzagorta García's article connects sociabilities and sexualities to the transformations of the Glorieta de Metro Insurgentes, moving from the end of the twentieth century through the early twenty-first century, when gentrification displaced many of the Glorieta's former inhabitants. These two articles are set in the era when Mexico City absorbed the most densely populated areas of the neighboring state of Mexico to become a metropolis whose population quintupled between 1950 and 1990, growing from 3,136,000 in 1950 to 15,048,000 in 1990.<sup>4</sup> While the contributing authors do not use quantitative methods or make statistical analyses, all of the histories they recount were profoundly shaped by this accelerating process of urban growth: they all seek to illuminate how the sexualities of specific groups of city dwellers responded to and helped to shape the city as it expanded around them.

### **Contributing to the Historiography of Sexuality in Mexico City**

Several generations of historians have researched the history of sexuality in Mexico. Their research has discussed some of the most essential passages in the history of sexuality in twentieth-century Mexico: prostitution and the episode of "The Famous 41"; the private gay party that was raided during the Porfiriato and gave visibility to effeminate male homosexuality; controversies over sexual education in the 1930s; the availability of effective birth control and sterilization in the 1970s; and, most recently, the rise of an LGBT movement.<sup>5</sup> In

4. Diane E. Davis, *El leviatán urbano: La Ciudad de México en el siglo XX* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999), 472. These statistics refer to the boundaries of Mexico City; if we take only the federal district into account, the scale of population growth is even more impressive: from 903,000 inhabitants in 1920 to 7,327,000 in 1970.

5. Robert Mc Kee Irwin, Edward J. McCaughn, and Michelle Rocío Nasser, eds., *The Famous 41: Sexuality and Social Control in Mexico, 1901* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003); Belinda Arteaga, *A gritos y sombrero: Historia de los debates sobre educación sexual en México, 1906–1946* (Mexico City: Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, 2002); Anne Rubenstein, "Raised Voices at the Cine Montecarlo: Sex Education, Mass Media, and Oppositional Politics in Mexico," *Journal of Family History* 23, no. 3 (1998): 312–23; Mary Kay Vaughan, *Portrait of a Young Painter: Pepe Zúñiga and Mexico's Rebel Generation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); Rafael de la Dehesa, *Incursiones queer en la esfera pública: Movimientos, por los derechos sexuales en México y Brasil* (Mexico City: Programa Universitario de Estudios de Género/Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2015); Sofía Arguello Pazmiño, "Identificaciones en disputa: (Des)construcciones identitarias del Movimiento de Liberación Homosexual (MLM) mexicano, 1968–1984," in *Arenas de conflicto y*

contrast to history, disciplines in the social sciences (notably cultural and social anthropology, sociology, and political science) have demonstrated the centrality of sexuality in making sense of political, cultural, and social processes in Mexico City. For example, in some recent studies, male homosexuality and transgender identities have attracted a great deal of attention from social scientists, both as objects of inquiry in themselves and as illuminating to broader fields of research into questions of sexuality and social, cultural, and political change.<sup>6</sup> Equally, other studies have focused on debates around issues of abortion and prostitution.<sup>7</sup> The complexity of this rapidly

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*experiencias colectivas: Horizontes utópicos de dominación, México*, ed. María Luisa Tarrés Barraza, Laura L. Montes de Oca Barrera, and Diana A. Silvia Londoño (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2014), 125–63; Jocelyn Olcott, *International Women's Year: The Greatest Consciousness-Raising Event in History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); and Pamela J. Fuentes, "Entre reivindicaciones sexuales y reclamos de justicia económica: Divisiones políticas e ideológicas durante la Conferencia Mundial del Año Internacional de la Mujer, México, 1975," *Secuencia: Revista de Historia y Ciencias Sociales* 89 (2014): 163–92.

6. Annick Prieur, *Mama's House, Mexico City: On Transvestites, Queens and Machos* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Jordi Diez, *The Politics of Gay Marriage in Latin America: Argentina, Chile, and Mexico* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Rodrigo Laguarda, *Ser gay en la Ciudad de México: Lucha y apropiación de una identidad, 1968–1982* (Mexico City: Instituto Mora/Centro de Investigaciones y Antropología Social, 2009); Rodrigo Parrini and Alejandro Brito, eds., *La memoria y el deseo: Estudios gay y queer en México*, (Mexico City: Programa Universitario de Estudios de Género/Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2014); José Ignacio Lanzagorta, "Buscándolo en la Zona Rosa," in *Antes del orgullo: Recuperando la memoria gay*, ed. Jorge Luis Peralta (Barcelona: Egales, 2019), 141–54; Ana Paulina Gutiérrez Martínez, *Atmósferas trans: Sociabilidades, internet y tránsitos de género en la Ciudad de México* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, forthcoming); and Rafael de la Dehesa, *IncurSIONES queer en la esfera pública: Movimientos, por los derechos sexuales en México y Brasil* (Mexico City: Programa Universitario de Estudios de Género/Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2015). Although they cover locations outside of Mexico City, it is still important to consider the following works: Rosío Córdova Plaza and Jesús Pretelín Ricárdez, *El Buiñuel: Homoerotismo y cuerpos abyectos en la oscuridad de un cine porno en Veracruz* (Mexico City: Itaca, 2017); Guillermo Núñez Noriega, *Just between Us: An Ethnography of Male Identity and Intimacy in Rural Communities of Northern Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014); Guillermo Núñez Noriega, *Sexo entre varones: Poder y resistencia en el campo sexual* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México/ Programa Universitario de Estudios de Género, 2015); and Rodrigo Parrini, *Deseografías: Una antropología del deseo* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México/ Programa Universitario de Estudios de Género, 2018).

7. E.g., Marta Lamas, "El fulgor de la noche: Algunos aspectos de la prostitución callejera en la Ciudad de México," *Debate feminista* 8, no. 4 (1993): 103–34; Alicia Márquez Murrieta, *El aborto en el México del siglo XXI: Acontecimiento y problema público en el caso de Paulina, de víctima a protagonista* (Mexico City: Instituto Mora, 2013).

changing field makes it difficult to analyze the current state of the field of studies of sexuality in Mexico City in the social sciences here.

Given this limitation, we limit ourselves to pointing out the recent emergence of a historiography that, moving beyond seeing sexuality as a compensatory category—in other words, a historiography that excavated previously hidden lives and communities—places sexuality at the center of the national history. New work by historians of sexuality has begun to demonstrate how studying sexuality is crucial for understanding histories of Mexico City in the twentieth century and for broader histories of Mexico.<sup>8</sup> For example, studies of the history of prostitution have changed how postrevolutionary state policies of social hygiene and sanitation are understood, demonstrating how Mexicans accepted, rejected, and transformed these policies.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, studies of changes in regulation of commercial sex, along with research on waves of morality campaigns against places where gay men and transsexual women gathered, have helped explain changes in the fabric of urban life.<sup>10</sup> Violence against women

8. Katherine Bliss, *Compromised Positions: Prostitution, Public Health, and Gender Politics in Revolutionary Mexico City* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2001); Anne Rubenstein and Victor Macías González, eds., *Masculinity and Sexuality in Modern Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012); Cristina Rivera Garza, *La Castañeda: Narrativas dolientes desde el manicomio, 1910–1930* (Mexico City: Tusquets Editores, 2010); Víctor Macías González, “The Transnational Homophile Movement and the Development of Domesticity in Mexico City’s Homosexual Community, 1930–70,” *Gender and History* 26, no. 3 (2014): 519–44; Nathaly Rodríguez Sánchez, “De Cuauhtemotzín a las cervecerías: El control oficial del homoerotismo masculino y la construcción estratégica de la geografía disidente, ciudad de México, 1930–1951,” *Historia Mexicana* 68, no. 1/269 (July–September 2018): 111–76; and Karina Felitti, “De la ‘mujer moderna’ a la ‘mujer liberada’: Un análisis de la revista Claudia de México (1965–1977),” *Historia Mexicana* 67, no. 3/267 (January–March 2018): 1345–394.

9. Bliss, *Compromised*; Fernanda Núñez Becerra and Pamela J. Fuentes, “Facing a Double Standard: Prostitution in Mexico City, 1521–2006,” in *Selling Sex in the City: A Global History of Prostitution 1600s–2000s*, ed. Lex Heerma van Voss, Magaly Rodríguez García, and Elise van Nederveen Meerkek (Leiden: Brill Editions, 2017), 444–65; Robert Buffington and Donna Guy, “Sex Trafficking” in Heerma van Voss, Rodríguez García, and Van Nederveen Meerkek, 151–95; María Rosa Gudiño Cejudo, *Educación higiénica y cine de salud en México, 1925–1960* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2016); María del Carmen Zavala Ramírez, “El enfermo venéreo, víctima o criminal? El delito de contagio venéreo en México en la primera mitad del siglo XX,” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 35, no. 1 (Winter 2019): 5–33.

10. Sara Minerva Luna Elizarrarás, “Enriquecimiento y legitimidad presidencial: Discusiones sobre identidades masculinas durante la campaña moralizadora de Adolfo Ruiz Cortines,” *Historia mexicana* 63, no. 3 (2014): 1367–420; Ana Paulina Gutiérrez Martínez, “Cambios y permanencias en la atmósfera cultural transfemenina de la Ciudad de México,” *Estudios Sociológicos* 38, no.112 (2020): 73–102; José Ignacio

has been the least well-studied area, whether focusing on streets, workplaces, or homes.<sup>11</sup>

One advantage of using sexuality as a category of analysis is that it decenters the role of elite policymakers and thus enables historians and social scientists to look more carefully at the interplay between ordinary citizens and structures of the state. These structures include, among others, government agencies, state industries, and cultural institutions, including mass media and the Catholic Church. Rather than seeing history as either top-down or bottom-up, through the notion of sexualities we explore a Gramscian dialectic, meaning that we approach historical change as produced through the negotiation between elite and nonelite actors. For example, medical doctors and policy reformers have struggled to define and modernize sexual identities; politicians and clergy have tried to regulate sexual behavior; radio, film, television, and other mass media have offered old and new visions of what constitutes normal and deviant desires. All the while, ordinary citizens have considered, accepted, modified, or rejected new ideas about sex and sexuality to suit their own realities, needs, desires, and ideals. State and other institutions have interacted with ordinary city dwellers to create a shifting urban landscape, full of sites of desire, tension, fear, love, disgust, and anxiety. These everyday people—women and men of the elite or the working classes, with contrasting degrees of education, different tastes, and distinct cultural practices and social habits—created new identities within the spaces and communities that were part of modern city life, and, in doing so, they participated in the transformation of Mexico City in the twentieth century. Therefore, considering space and place carefully is crucial to studying the history of sexuality.

Like New York, Berlin, and Rio de Janeiro, Mexico City is one of the places in which modern forms of sexual identities and sexual communities emerged, often to be challenged, contested, and

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Lanzagorta García, "La Zona Rosa: Un estudio socioespacial sobre género, sexualidad, sociabilidad e imaginario urbano en la Ciudad de México" (PhD. diss, El Colegio de México, 2018); and Carlos Monsiváis, *Que se abra esa puerta: Crónicas y ensayos sobre la diversidad sexual* (Mexico City: Paidós, 2012).

11. See, e.g., Ana Lidia García Peña, *El fracaso del amor: Género e individualismo en el siglo XIX mexicano* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2006). However, awareness and understanding of sexual violence is increasingly central to public debate, as the use of #MeToo in Mexican social media made clear in spring 2019. Social media complaints of sexual harassment and violence made by women who work in journalism, publishing, science, and arts, among others, called attention to the absence of research on the history of sexual violence in Mexico City. It is one of many topics in the history of sexuality in Mexico awaiting historians.

negotiated.<sup>12</sup> The capital has long served as the center of Mexican politics, economic development, and cultural production, and thus much of the political and social history of the nation has concentrated there. Mexico City therefore provides complex contexts for examining all sorts of Mexican stories. But we aim to go beyond that, treating the city as a historical actor in its own right.

Our aim here is to contribute to further understanding of the particular social, cultural, political, and spatial dynamics of Mexico City. The following articles track how changes in the city's geography have created and erased new spaces for different kinds of sexual encounters to occur and for sexual communities to flourish, and how the growth and disappearance of different kinds of sexual practices and subcultures have, in turn, shaped the city's map. The essays on spaces of sociability and zones of conflict investigate the city as an actor in the history of sexuality, providing a new way of understanding the city's history. For example, Lanzagorta García considers streets and plazas; Cano considers neighborhoods, private homes, and slums; and Rubenstein, Crespo Reyes and Fuentes, Sanders, and De Pablo Hammeken discuss buildings, such as movie houses, hospitals, churches, and theaters, which were open to the public.

Our reading of Mexico City as a principal actor in twentieth-century history refers not only to Mexico as a whole but also to the larger transnational stage. As several articles show, people came to Mexico City from around the world as tourists, as reformers, as exiles, as short-term visitors (whose reasons for travel could be work, study, or leisure), and as migrants with different backgrounds. People also moved out of the city, going all over the world as migrant workers, diplomats, artists, intellectuals, and tourists. Pictures, sounds, texts, and ideas traveled too, carried in and out of the city in magazine pages and radio waves, sermons and museum exhibits, movies and medical journals. Urban planning, architecture styles, leisure activities, and spaces in Mexico City were often inspired by foreign models, and each creation implicated process of adaptation and cultural appropriation and interaction between the local and the foreign. In all of these transnational processes, sexuality played a central role; and in order to understand transnational sexuality, we need to focus on the city itself. The articles by Cano, De Pablo Hammeken, Rubenstein, and

12. George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); James Green, *Beyond Carnival: Male Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); and Robert Beachy, *Gay Berlin: Birthplace of a Modern Identity* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2014).



Lanzagorta García, therefore, focus on how Mexico City's cosmopolitan character supported change in how individuals formed their identities and sexual communities. The articles also hint at ways in which Mexico City's sexual subcultures (as groups that detached themselves from established social norms) helped to shape the city's cosmopolitanism. Other articles, such as those by Sanders and by Crespo Reyes and Fuentes, focus on the anxieties produced by and the reactions to transnational sexual discourses.

Overall, the articles in this issue invite us to think about sexual identities as contingent and constantly in flux, responding to processes of self-definition and communal identification in private gatherings and public spaces, within the shifting conditions of the city's history. These spaces were shaped by regulations intended to control female sexuality, as well as by cultural efforts meant to support heterosexuality as a social norm. Except for the parties known as *balmoreadas* (gatherings of men and women linked to the world of publishing and journalism, which took place in private homes), the histories recounted here focus on public sites of sociability and entertainment, such as the movie theaters, where gender norms governed the experience of moviegoers in ways that included where they could sit and even such intangibles as odors. To watch a film in the company of friends, family, or strangers was, at times, an expression of sexual desire and identity. Audiences understood De Molina's theatrical performances—particularly his body language—as revealing a queer femininity that provoked their homophobia and led to him being expelled from the country. The sociability of young gay men who met at the Glorieta de Metro Insurgentes was bounded by market forces competing for space and by policies intended to normalize and enforce heterosexuality and consumer capitalism. Catholic campaigns designed to impose morality on women unfolded on Mexico City's streets, as well as in places like the Morelos Hospital, which primarily served sex workers; these public campaigns, however, were meant to intervene in aspects of embodied private life such as dress, self-presentation, and health care. Finally, self-censorship also shaped the expression of sexuality, as with the journalists and other writers who erased almost every reference to the *balmoreadas* as sites of sexual diversity and to the homosexuality of De Molina and Salazar; self-censorship could be a strategy to evade homophobia.

### Sources and Methodology

The methodological and theoretical apparatus used to study the history of sexuality questions the apparent stability and naturalization

of sexual categories (such as homosexuality and heterosexuality), and instead examines how these categories have been socially constructed and change over time.<sup>13</sup> This framework has enabled historians to formulate new questions. Among these inquiries, the history of sexuality examines moral panics; embodied expressions and self-presentation of individuals with a wide range of sexual and gender identifications; and the social interactions that connect sexuality with the expressions of masculinity and femininity that have been part of historical change. Moreover, the history of sexuality has expanded the type of materials that count as documentary evidence. This includes noncanonical literature—genre fiction, sensationalist journalism, pornography, and more—that typically has been seen as having no cultural or literary value. These types of historical documents often take some pains for historians to find, as archives and libraries rarely consider them important enough to be preserved. However, texts like these are rich sources for the study of the history of sexuality. Beyond that, as the capital is the political, cultural, and economic heart of the country, historians of Mexico City have access to a wide range of more traditional sources, including federal and local government documents, and published books and periodicals. These sources highlight how Mexico City's national and transnational influence and power have shaped the history of sexuality. Building on this approach, the six articles in this special issue use a wide range of historical sources, which include documents from municipal, federal, and organizational archival records (such as police records and the documents of lay Catholic organizations), daily newspapers, the tabloid press, memoirs, novels, blog posts, oral histories, and others.

Interpreting the meaning of such set of sources for the history of sexuality requires a critical reading against the grain. This is a form of oblique examination of the source materials in light of historical interrogations relating to the history of sexuality. The aim is to tease out meanings that are often coded and oblique but significant for specific research questions. Of course, this interpretative reading requires a deep knowledge of the language and ideas of specific actors and contexts. Identifying meanings that are not explicit is part of reading against the grain. These processes include dealing with issues such as the interaction of different sexual identities, the performance of sexual acts, the censorship of homoerotic and heterosexual

13. We understand the term *naturalization* to mean “the claim that inequalities based in biology are natural, irreversible, or difficult to change.” See Maxine Baca Zinn et al., eds., “*Gender Through the Prism of Difference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 578 (s.v. “naturalization”).

practices, the formation of heterodox sexual communities, and the organization of policies of surveillance and resistance.

Our approach to the history of sexuality in Mexico City uses a distinct methodology centrally concerned with the social construction of sexual identities and with the regulation of and resistance to norms and patterns of sexuality. It is thus tightly connected to a historiography of gender that concerns itself with constructions of masculinity and femininity, because sexualities are practically inseparable from gendered social norms and identities—and beyond that, both gender and sexuality are always shaped by historically contingent ideas about power and privilege.

From this perspective and using multiple sources, the essays in this special issue offer rich accounts about the history of both the sexuality of ordinary people and of those in positions of power who lived in Mexico City during the process of modernization from the early 1920s to the present day. In this endeavor, each article uses distinct sources. In the first section, Cano relies principally on little-known books and memoirs, as well as on press coverage of the *balmoreadas*, which were private parties organized with the purpose of playing a hoax on a previously selected guest. From these printed sources, Cano proposes a new interpretation of the *balmoreadas* as spaces open to sexual diversity. In the next article, Rubenstein examines sexual practices and the ways in which masculinity has manifested itself among moviegoers in Mexico City between 1920 and 2010. The sources for her analysis include police files, municipal archives, periodicals, and materials from the film industry, as well as internet sources such as blogs and comments on fan sites. Periodicals are a central source in Lanzagorta García's essay "La conquista de la Glorieta de Insurgentes de la Ciudad de México," which, through both newspapers and interviews, examines the people who were expelled from the Glorieta de Insurgentes in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries because of their perceived sexual identity.

In the second section, Crespo Reyes and Fuentes examine similarities between the policies of the state and the moralization measures that certain Catholic groups dictated to help and control women engaged in sex work in the 1920s. The study is based on documents produced by these Catholic organizations and reports of spies who infiltrated these groups, as well as on magazines and newspapers. Meanwhile, Sanders explores campaigns undertaken by Catholic actors interested in moralizing society, particularly to influence women, using the press (Catholic and national publications) and archival documents of organizations that undertook such

moralizing campaigns. Finally, De Pablo Hammecken relies mainly on biographies, literature, letters, and Mexican newspapers that reported a conflict between unionized actors to locate evidence of the gay identities of Salazar and De Molina and the homophobic reactions that each one of them faced.

### Structure

This part of the special issue is divided into two sections. The first section, “Sociabilities and Spaces of Sexualities,” considers the role that physical spaces played in creating areas where some city dwellers explored new sexual identities and practices, and places where sociability led to the formation of sexual communities. These spaces and places also served as physical locations where sexuality was intimately tied to politics—in particular, at parties that allowed bohemians to interact with political elites in the 1920s and in negative interactions with the state apparatus, such as attempts to control pedestrians cruising in the Glorieta de Insurgentes in the 1990s. Tensions between those citizens who wished to create space to express their sexuality and those who sought to regulate or exclude what they regarded as transgressive sexuality shaped both the way that residents experienced their city and how these experiences shaped larger economic and political processes.

First, Cano’s article discusses the *balmoreadas*—parties held in the late 1920s and early 1930s that served as spaces of bohemian sociability, bringing together men and women with ties to the intellectual and political elite of Mexico City. These gatherings were places that included a critique of the accumulation of wealth and social status. At the same time, they provided space for the safe expression of what political elites and moral campaigners considered transgressive sexuality. Rubenstein’s essay examines movie theaters as spaces in which men could enact their identities as men, including learning about and expressing their sexualities. Rubenstein shows that the movies were a place for men to express and act on both desire for other men and desire for the women they watched on the screen. Her article traces how movies and moviegoing allowed for both a physical and imaginary space for men to engage with each other and with women over the course of the twentieth century. This culminated in the late twentieth century with the transformation of the Cine Teresa, in the center of the city, from a deluxe movie palace to a grindhouse—a movie theater that showed only hard-core pornography—in which some men watched heterosexual porn while others had sex with each other. Lanzagorta García’s article looks at

the space known as the Zona Rosa and focuses specifically on the Glorieta de Insurgentes, a large, open circular space surrounding the entrance to the metro station Insurgentes and bordering the Zona Rosa. The Glorieta, the subway station, and the Zona Rosa as a whole are public spaces where gay, lesbian, and transgender people have gathered, even as the city administration has sought to gentrify the area and push people with nonnormative gender and sexual identities out of the path of commercial change. This article examines the tensions between these two communities of people as they have fought for the right for control over this public space over the last two decades.

The second section, "Regulation and Resistance," discusses episodes in the construction of local, national, and transnational twentieth-century dialogues about sexuality and the production and regulation of sexual knowledge. One such institution that sought to control and regulate sexual knowledge was the Catholic Church, both transnationally and in Mexico. The traditional historiography of the Mexican revolutionary and postrevolutionary periods tended to interpret the Catholic Church and the state as two monoliths fighting for the heart and souls of Mexicans. In this model, Mexicans were either staunch Catholics, in ready opposition to the secular state, or supportive citizens who saw the church as backward and anti-modern. More recent scholarship has troubled this neat dichotomy, and studies of sexuality reveal where significant overlap occurred in church and state interests, particularly in the regulation of women's sexuality.<sup>14</sup> The three articles that comprise this section show how ecclesiastical and state authorities used women's and men's bodies to reinforce and augment their own political and social power.

Crespo Reyes and Fuentes explore the regulation of prostitution in the 1920s. They examine the programs instituted by the state-run

14. Patience Schell, *Church and State in Revolutionary Mexico City* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003); Patience Schell, "An Honorable Avocation for Ladies: The Work of the Mexico City Unión de Damas Católicas Mexicanas, 1912–1926," *Journal of Women's History* 10, no.4 (Winter 1999): 78–103; Katherine E. Bliss, "Theater of Operations: Reform, Politics, and the Battle for Prostitutes' Redemption at Revolutionary Mexico City's Syphilis Hospital," in *The Women's Revolution in Mexico, 1910–1953*, ed. Stephanie Mitchell and Patience Schell (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 125–48; Barbara Miller, "The Role of Women in the Mexican Cristero Rebellion: *Las señoras y las religiosas*," *The Americas* 74, no.1 (2017): 303–23; and Laura O'Dogherty Madrazo, "Restaurarlo todo en Cristo: Unión de Damas Católicas Mejicanas, 1920–1926," *Estudios de Historia Moderna y Contemporánea de México* 14 (1992): 129–58.

Hospital Morelos and Catholic programs run by women's groups, including the Ejército de la Defensa de la Mujer. What Crespo Reyes and Fuentes find is that, despite the seeming "clash" between the postrevolutionary state and the Catholic Church, attitudes and programs designed to regulate the prostitutes were remarkably similar. Both programs sought to rehabilitate prostitutes, and both saw that the most effective way to do this was through the segregation of women into facilities like the Hospital Morelos or Catholic "regeneration" homes until the women were deemed "socialized." Crespo Reyes and Fuente's work illustrates how the regulation of women's bodies and sexuality was a key point not only in the construction of the postrevolutionary state but also in the construction of a postrevolutionary Catholic Church.

Sanders's essay also examines how the Catholic Church sought to regulate women's sexuality as a means of consolidating ecclesiastic power in 1950s Mexico City. In this case, the church used the lay organizations of Acción Católica to organize civic campaigns aimed at promoting a Catholic morality that would serve as ballast against what they viewed as an immoral popular culture. The women's branches of Acción Católica, the Unión Femenina Católica Mexicana and the Juventud Femenina Católica Mexicana worked as foot soldiers in the campaign, reporting to the Catholic hierarchy the examples they found of what they saw as immorality—such as pornography, inappropriate films, music, or locations that might be considered places of vice. Women were then encouraged to report these instances to the appropriate city or federal authorities. Thus, Sanders finds that while, on the one hand, the church derived power through its ability to monitor and circumscribe women's sexuality, women themselves, on the other hand, also derived a sort of social power and capital from their participation in these campaigns.

In the last article, De Pablo Hammeken explores the scandal surrounding the famed Spanish singer De Molina during his brief stay in Mexico, as well as the exile experience of the music critic Salazar. Expelled from both Spain and Argentina—purportedly for his flamboyant style—De Molina went to Mexico City because the city was considered to be more tolerant of diverse sexualities. Unfortunately, De Molina became embroiled in a fight between two labor unions; one of these unions launched a homophobic campaign to defame De Molina, which resulted in the cancellation of his contract and, in the end, drove De Molina from Mexico. This article focuses on the fight between the two unions and shows how discourses surrounding sexuality—and what was perceived as legitimate sexuality as delineated by institutions like the Catholic Church—were key in the

construction of the power between 1940s labor unions and the state. De Molina, like his colleague Salazar, was an exile displaced by the Spanish Civil War. This article shows how ideas about foreignness, sexuality, and expressions of gender could produce distinct experiences for gay men. Queer experiences and the necessity of finding a safe and permanent home narrowed the possibilities of self-expression that were open to them in Mexico City.

### **Moral Panics and the Control of Urban Space**

Although many threads connect the six articles in this issue, two themes stand out: sexual morality and censorship, and contestations over urban space. Focusing on sexual morality, the articles by Crespo Reyes and Fuentes and Sanders analyze the moralizing impulse by studying Catholic and lay campaigns that attempted to inculcate family values in Mexico City's populace, especially women. Crespo Reyes and Fuentes describe how the Ejército de Defensa de la Mujer and the Departamento de Salubridad Pública tried to cleanse the bodies and souls of prostitutes in the postrevolutionary era. Sanders, focusing on the Cold War era, describes the efforts of the women of Acción Católica to control women's behavior and looks, and to attempt to make fashion and women's self-presentations project an image of modernity while still conforming with Catholic sexual morality. De Pablo Hammeken focuses on transnational cultural interactions and how the effects of a conservative Catholic notion of heterosexual masculinity shaped ideas about labor unions and entertainment.

At the same time that these projects sought to control sexual behavior, censorship also played a role in public and private life, making itself felt in domestic spaces, private gatherings, and public records. Cano describes how, in the 1920s, flexible sexual identities—transgressive to a greater or lesser degree—found a space in which they could be expressed at the parties thrown by the fake millionaire Carlos Balmori. The morality campaigns of the time did not touch these gatherings, but censorship—especially self-censorship—influenced the widely circulated accounts of them at the time and in subsequent decades: most media accounts of Balmori's parties erased the presence of gay men, lesbians, and transgender people among the guests. Self-censorship also shaped the memoirs and letters of musician Salazar, a Spanish exile in Mexico City, who left very few hints of his participation in the city's queer social life, as De Pablo Hammeken shows. In her article, Rubenstein describes cinema as one of the most widely shared forms of media, enjoyed by people

of all classes. Cinema was, therefore, also one of the favorite targets of morality campaigns and censorship, although this did not prevent male moviegoers from using cinemas as a space for sexual adventure and experimentation.

Finally, all of the articles in this special issue also reflect spatial changes in the city. The urban landscape gave form to individual and collective expressions of sexuality in Mexico City, and, in turn, the city's landscape was shaped by them. Both the men and women who sought to rehabilitate prostitutes and the attendees of the balmor-eadas lived in a city undergoing rapid change due to the violence of the revolution. Later in the twentieth century, moviegoers, Catholic laywomen, and sex workers all shared the crowded downtown space, caught up in the processes of physical destruction and construction and social change that accompanied the first moments of uncontrolled urbanization and demographic expansion of the 1940s, and then again in the waves of modernization that characterized later decades in Mexico City. Acción Católica's efforts to control women's appearance emerged in the same historical period that Ernesto P. Uruchurtu, who governed the city from 1952 to 1966, imposed his vision of modernity and morality on the capital's streets and avenues. One of the consequences of his regime's interventions was the persecution of sex workers and gay men, and the displacement of their communities from their habitual gathering places. One of the Uruchurtu government's most significant interventions in the structure of the city was the early stages of the construction of the metro system. Once the metro finally opened in 1969, it closed the distances between the city's neighborhoods at the same time as it sped up changes to the urban landscape resulting from decades of dizzyingly fast demographic expansion. As a result, new urban spaces emerged, and older ones changed; the Glorieta del Metro Insurgentes, for example, was transformed into an important meeting place, with extraordinarily dense foot traffic. Sexually transgressive young men made the Glorieta their own, using it as a geographical reference and place to gather. But, as Lanzagorta García writes, the ongoing process of change in the area, most of all the intense gentrification of recent decades, ended up displacing this community of young people all over again.

### Opening Dialogues

We deliberately sought to publish our research in *Mexican Studies/ Estudios Mexicanos* rather than in a journal on gender history or sexuality studies, with the goal to engage in dialogue with other



Mexicanists. We hope to contribute to conversations with historians and social scientists of Mexico and to promote dialogue across generational, linguistic, and disciplinary lines about what constitutes Mexican history. Across the three countries of North America, debates focusing on sexual practices, spaces, and representations are flourishing, along with new interpretations on state surveillance of bodies. The articles included here draw on this scholarly literature and contribute to furthering understanding of the modern era in Mexico City. This special issue is part of an active collaboration between a group of Mexicanists based in Mexico, Canada, and the United States, from different generations and professional experiences. While bringing distinct perspectives to the project, we hope to encourage further dialogue and intellectual exchange regarding Mexico City's history of sexuality.

All of the authors included here are indebted to colleagues whose long hours of research and writing have placed sexuality and gender as central categories of analysis and have contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of Mexico's history. Above all, the work of Carlos Monsiváis has inspired our curiosity and shaped our thinking. His articles and essays opened up discussions about the history of homosexuality and heterosexuality, sexual morality, cinema, popular culture, and more.<sup>15</sup> Not all of the articles in this special issue refer explicitly to Monsiváis's work, but his influence on all of us—whether direct or indirect—is powerful. The significance of his work is only beginning to be felt by historians. We miss him.

The complexity of Mexico's capital during the twentieth century obviously creates important challenges for scholars. The articles in this issue capture only a few of the vast array of sexual interactions that shaped both the places and daily exchanges of people coexisting in a constantly changing metropolis. Mexico City's rapid-fire growth throughout the century merged bodies, attitudes, and desires. The city's visitors and inhabitants trespassed on private and public spaces, and contested these same spaces and socio-political rules. The processes explored by the authors in this issue remain visible today in contemporary struggles, forms of entertainment, and in collective memories of the city. In these interactions, as in those of the last century, sexuality is an essential element in understanding the complexities of life in Mexico City.

15. See especially Carlos Monsiváis, *Que se abra*; Carlos Monsiváis, *Misógino feminista*, ed. Marta Lamas (Mexico City: Océano, 2013); Carlos Monsiváis, *Los rituales del caos* (Mexico City: Era, 1995); and Carlos Monsiváis, *Salvador Novo: Lo marginal en el centro* (Mexico City: Era, 2000).