

CRÍTICA Y DISCURSO

“NO SOMOS ENFERMOS NI CRIMINALES”: EARLY MOBILIZATIONS AROUND GENDER AND SEXUALITIES IN COLOMBIA AND MEXICO

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One of the most powerful and meaningful slogans that made presence during the first public demonstrations of the Colombian and Mexican mobilizations around gender and sexualities was “*no somos enfermos ni criminales*” [we are neither sick nor criminals] (See Fig. 1), which pointed directly to the discourses of pathologisation and criminalization of homosexuality, that sustained abuses and persecution suffered by those with non-normative gender identities and sexual orientations. This message arises too as a reaction to what has been described by Mario Pecheny and Rafael de la Dehesa as “the heteronormative model of social organization consolidated by the new secular-liberal regimes of the latter part of the nineteenth century in Latin America” (as cited in Díez, 2015b, p. 34).

Figure 1. First public demonstration of the *FHAR Frente Homosexual de Acción Revolucionaria* (Homosexual Front of Revolutionary Action), in Mexico City (1978)



The consolidation of that model relied on medical and legal discourses of regulation of homosexuality. In the legal sphere, as asserted by Díez (2015b), the strong influence of French politics in Latin American Liberal leaders -who were pursuing the secularization of their states- led them to adopt Napoleonic codes in most of continental Latin America. Given that the French civil code of 1804 did not criminalize same-sex relations, this resulted in the decriminalization of homosexual relations in many Latin American countries.¹ Nevertheless, ‘indecentcy’ and ‘scandal’ in public remained as vague criminal offences included in penal codes, and even when homosexuality itself was not a crime, any ‘scandalous’ homosexual behavior was punishable. On the medical dimension, during the late nineteenth century a profound influence of the European ideas of positivism and modernity in a period of “order and progress” in Latin America, led to a proliferation of medical and psychological explanations for homosexuality, which began to be considered “a disease, a physiological defect and

1 In the case of Colombia, the criminalization of homosexual relations disappeared in this process but reappeared with the penal code of 1936. That criminal offence was removed again in the Colombian penal code of 1980 (Bustamante, 2008).

a social threat” (p. 35). This criminalization and pathologisation of homosexuality in Latin America contributed to the consolidation and sustenance of the heteronormative model of social organization during the twentieth century -part of the Nation building-, being heteronormativity “the primary mechanism to regulate gender relations and sexuality.” (p. 35).

In that context of structural oppression and persecution, the bold initiative of all the individuals and collectives that marched together for the first time was needed. With this act of public visibility, claiming for freedom of the violent regulation of their bodies and desires, all of them set the beginning of a series of political achievements for people with non-normative gender and sexualities in Colombia and Mexico. However, how was possible to reach this point? Also, what happened afterwards? The central argument developed throughout this paper will be that, in the case of the Colombian and Mexican mobilizations around gender and sexualities, after years of debate, reflection, struggle and resistance, waving flags of ‘homosexual liberation’, and defying criminalization and pathologisation of non-normative sexual orientations and gender identities, a series of transnational economic, political, and social conditions allowed, and lead to, the consolidation of a liberal rights-based discourse as the mainstream strategy and agenda of the movement. This shift implied that early radical and critical initiatives were set aside, opening the path for activism engaged with the state, which has set as paramount the legal strategy, pursuing the recognition of rights with legal precedents, laws and public policies.

In order to develop this idea, several questions will be addressed, such as: What was the regional frame for the early mobilizations around gender and sexualities in Latin America? Which were the conditions of emergence of the first groups around issues of gender and sexualities in Colombia and Mexico? How were comprised the first groups around gender and sexualities in both countries? What was the ideological and theoretical background of such groups? What was the scope of the discourse of liberation in these early mobilizations? What was the course of action of those early groups during the HIV/AIDS crisis? When and how occurred the shift from the homosexual liberation towards a liberal rights-based approach within these mobilizations? Moreover, which were the terms of the engagement of activists and organizations with the state? This paper is divided into the following sections: 1. Regional Context, where the Latin American context, which gives frame to the Colombian and Mexican mobilizations, will be described; 2. Local Antecedents, where key histories of violence and persecution against people with non-normative gender and sexualities, which prompted these early mobilizations in Colombia and Mexico, will be presented; 3. The Liberation Uprising, where the emergence of these mobilizations, its ideological background, and its early objectives, will be identified; 4. Complex

Crisis, where the response of activists and collectives in Colombia and Mexico to the HIV/AIDS crisis, and amidst other internal and external challenges during the 1980s, will be discussed; 5. Change and New Engagements, where the discursive shift from the 'homosexual liberation' towards a liberal rights-based approach, and the terms of the dialogue and engagement between individuals and organizations of these movements with the State will be analyzed.

1. Regional context

The social, political and cultural mobilizations of individuals with non-normative gender and sexualities in Latin America bear both coincidences and divergences with similar movements in other continents, regarding their history, achievements, debates and challenges for the future. Discrimination and violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersexual people are neither endemic nor new phenomena within this particular region of the world, although it is essential to be aware of its contextual particularities. Latin America, more than a vast geographical space that comprises numerous countries sharing borders and languages, is the conjunction of diverse expressions of wealth and deprivation, as well as oppression and emancipation. With a shared colonial past, that has both shaped its hybrid cultural complex and nurtured an ongoing spiral of violence, the region has been a fertile ground for the brutal exploitation of its human and natural resources (Galeano, 1973). Given this intricate background, the irruption of labour, indigenous, women, and black movements -and their persecution- comes as no surprise. Moreover, the most recent mobilization of 'LGBTI' collectives and individuals deserves a closer consideration, because of its relations with the former movements and its profound inner heterogeneity.

From the perspective of social movement studies, according to Graeme Chesters and Ian Welsh (2011), the mobilizations around gender and sexuality issues have been classified as part of the New Social Movements, those which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s standing for oppressed and marginalized sectors of society (p. 110). However, as the authors admit, this narrative only takes into account the series of events after the Stonewall Inn riots.² In 1969, and the subsequent uprising of the

2 About this event, Marc Stein gives a brief account from a North American perspective: In the early morning hours of June 28, 1969, a police raid on the Stonewall Inn, a private club on Christopher Street in Greenwich Village [in New York, NY, U.S.], prompted several days of rioting by thousands of New Yorkers. As was the case with many gay and lesbian bars in the period, the Stonewall was owned and operated by men with links to organized crime who made payments to the police to avoid raids and closures. At the time of the raid, the Stonewall was one of the city's most

Gay Liberation Front, given its public prominence and lasting impact on emergent mobilizations around the world (p. 111). Stonewall constitutes an essential referent for the mainstream narrative of the genesis of these movements, but it should not be taken as an exclusive foundational moment, which often casts a shadow over other relevant historical facts related to more specific regional and local contexts.

Following Simonetto (2014), one of those hidden events occurred in Argentina in 1967, when a young man, expelled from the Communist Party because of his sexual orientation, conceived a political collective called '*Grupo Nuestro Mundo*' [Group Our World]. His initiative drew the attention of people from diverse ideological fronts –Marxists, Filo-peronistas³, Christians, workers, and intellectuals- with a mutual interest in sexual liberation. In 1971, this group joined forces with an organisation from the University of Buenos Aires called '*Profesionales*' [Professionals]. The new partners created a more vocal organization named '*Frente de Liberación Homosexual*' [Homosexual Liberation Front], the first formal organization of Argentina's gender and sexualities movement (p. 151). Argentina, along with Brazil and Mexico, has one of the oldest movements of the continent (De la Dehesa, 2010, p. 2).

One common characteristic between the 'Gay Liberation Front' of the U.S. and the '*Frente de Liberación Homosexual*' of Argentina is their leftist ideological stance, opposing the liberal rights-based strategy of other organizations and leading radical demands for the emancipation of different kinds of oppression⁴. Albeit, one notable difference between those liberation fronts is their identity. In the case of the U.S., the

popular gay bars, in part because of its reputation for dancing and drugs. Most of its patrons were working and middle-class whites in their teens, twenties, and thirties, but there was a significant presence of African Americans and Latinos as well. Gay men, drag queens, street queens, transsexuals, sex workers, and others who transgressed gender and sexual norms frequented the bar, as did a small number of lesbians. On this night, the police lost control of the raid when patrons and passers-by -gay, lesbian, trans and straight- fought back with words, wits and weapons in what soon became a gay power riot. Over the next few days, thousands of New Yorkers battled the police for control of the streets near the Stonewall. Over the next few years, thousands of activists battled one another over the meanings of the Stonewall rebellion (2012, pp. 79-80).

- 3 Denomination used by people related to the philosophical ideas of Juan Domingo Perón (1895-1974), army colonel and politician who became president of Argentina in three opportunities, being founder and leader of the Peronist movement (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2015).
- 4 Although this is a common characteristic between these movements, the issues they were organized around depended on their geopolitical conditions. Given its radical politics, the Gay Liberation Front in the U.S. established alliances with anti-war and feminist mobilizations, and its anti-capitalist, anti-racist and anti-establishment politics were appealing for people of diverse backgrounds, interest and struggles (Stein, 2012, pp. 82-83). Meanwhile, the '*Frente de Liberación Homosexual*' in Argentina, with anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal and anti-imperialist roots, kept an active dialogue and cooperation with unions and feminists organizations (Simonetto, 2014, p. 153).

organization deployed the ‘gay’ identity taking distance from the pathological and criminal connotation of the notion of homosexuality. In the meantime, the American rationale did not dissuade the Argentine Liberation Front, which assumed the ‘homosexual’ identity as a way to exteriorize their sexual orientation, regarding it as an affirmative political category of difference. Although they were aware of its origins as a medical category, they choose to re-signify it (Figari, 2010).

2. Local antecedents

On the night of 19 of November 1901, a police raid broke into a private party in the center of Mexico City, finding 41 men, almost half of them dressed as women. Mexican cartoonist Jose Guadalupe Posada labelled that event as ‘*El baile de los 41 maricones*’ [The dance of the 41 faggots] (See Fig. 2). In the aftermath, despite the shock and outrage expressed by the local and national authorities, reproduced by newspapers and magazines, that gathering was not a criminal offence. However, it was considered immoral, and the 41 men were detained and sentenced by the governor to hard labor in a detention camp in the distant State of Yucatan (McKee Irwin, 2003, pp. 5-7). These “Famous 41”⁵, as Carlos Monsiváis pointed out, incarnated the ‘invention’ of homosexuality in the Mexican public sphere. Moreover, the actual number ‘41’ became a synonym for ‘homosexual’ for a long time, being the object of jokes and an infamous subject of the popular culture in Mexico.

Figure 2. ‘*El baile de los 41 maricones*’ [The Dance of the 41 Faggots]. José Guadalupe Posada (1901).



5 This is the English term used to denominate this event in the most comprehensive work dedicated to analyzing it: *The Famous 41: Sexuality and Social Control in Mexico, 1901*. Ed. McKee Irwin, Robert; McCaughan, Edward J.; Nasser, Michelle Rocío. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003.

One example of the success of these discourses about non-normative gender and sexuality performances in Mexico is analyzed by Susana Vargas, in her work on the media representations of trans women⁶ in the sensationalist magazine *'Alarma!'* [Alarm!] during the 1970s. In its pages, where many crimes were described in detail⁷, police raids on brothels and gay clubs were covered with large photographs of people found dressed as women. The newspaper coined a term to mock and name these 'object' subjects: *'Mujercitos'* [Little Wo-men or Effeminate Men] (Fig. 3). Most of the time, the photographs were described with colloquial expressions and rhetorical questions, plenty of moral content, such as *'¿Qué pasa? ¿Ya nadie quiere ser hombre?'* [What's the matter? Nobody wants to be a man anymore?]⁸, *'Mas "Mujercitos!"'* [More "Little Wo-men!"], *'Festines secretos de invertidos!'* [Secret feasts of inverted!], *'Nacieron hombres!'* [They were born men!], or *'Asquerosa depravación sexual!'* [Disgusting sexual depravity!] (S. Vargas, 2015). However, despite the public rejection, these dances and similar gatherings between men have happened, before and after the 'Famous 41', or the raids of *'Mujercitos'*. Those have been underground spaces of entertainment, flirting and freedom for these social 'deviants'. Moreover,

6 By the time of those publications, categories such as transgender or trans women had not emerged yet, and people with non-normative gender identities were labelled as 'homosexuals' or 'effeminates', among other epithets.

7 As it happens in many sensationalist magazines and newspapers, *'Alarma!'* was specialized in the genre of true crime, offering a detailed account of violent events, usually including photographs of bloody crime scenes. Many of the stories related in *'Alarma!'* were classified as passion crimes.

8 The debates around masculinity in Mexico in the second half of the twentieth century were related to broader social phenomena. The controversial and stereotypical figure of the Mexican 'macho' was both despised and praised, having a profound impact in the construction of national identity. According to Macias-Gonzalez & Rubenstein (2012):

Intellectuals blamed Mexico's social and economic ills on the figure of the urban working-class macho, much like contemporaneous social critics in the United States and England blamed many social problems on the figure of the juvenile delinquent. (...) The 1940s and 1950s were also the Golden Age of the Mexican film industry, and some of the most popular comedies and melodramas of the era reflected intellectuals' ideas about working-class masculinity. However, where [intellectuals] Octavio Paz and Oscar Lewis linked Mexican manhood to Mexico's troubles, the movies celebrated the same stereotypical vision of masculinity. Stars like Jorge Negrete, Pedro Infante, Luis Aguilar, Tin-Tan, and Cantinflas, among others, played roles ranging from singing cowboys to singing cops and singing automobile mechanics, and they always showed these men as heroic. Even when they were comic figures, these stars played characters who were bold, tough, competent, loyal, loving and resourceful. The movies transformed the stereotype of the Mexican macho from a national menace to a source of national pride. (...) so the Revolutionary-era debates over masculinity, femininity and citizenship appeared to have been decided as the 1970s began. Mexicans appeared to agree on what typical male behavior was and seemed to know, too, what constituted typical male character. A broad political consensus seemed to have been reached about how the Mexican state should relate to both (pp. 20-21).

these venues have served as the setting for the emergence of the current mobilizations against abuse, violence and discrimination.

Figure 3. Cover of '*Mujercitos*' [Little Wo-men]. Susana Vargas (2015)



In Colombia, there is no record of an event similar to the 'Famous 41'. However, the earliest registered introduction of the notion of homosexuality in the public sphere happened with the drafting of the Penal Code of 1936. In this legal text emerged a new criminal offence called '*acceso carnal homosexual*' [homosexual carnal access], using the notion of homosexuality in a double sense: as a mental illness and as a wrongful act against nature and the 'honor of masculinity'. Those men who were convicted of such behaviour would face prison from 6 months up to 2 years, even if it were a consensual act between adults. There were no registered convictions, but that criminal offence was the legal support for police raids and abuses against people with non-normative gender or sexuality in Colombia, even after 1980 when the '*acceso carnal homosexual*' was excluded from the criminal legislation (Bustamante, 2008). This legal excerpt was an important contribution to the construction of the 'homosexual' subject in a legal and medical sense. However, the social and political contexts of these discourses were considerably more complex.

Violence, as a systemic phenomenon, has been one of the prevailing circumstances of the emergence of these mobilizations, is an essential context in Mexico, and a constant condition in Colombia. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersexual people have not only faced violence because of their sexual orientation, gender or sexual identity; they have been one of the vulnerable populations within the whole civil society affected by war and conflict. After the 'Famous 41' of 1901, Mexico experienced one of the most tumultuous chapters of their history, known as the Mexican Revolution of 1910. That era began with the end of the long liberal regime of Porfirio Díaz and a violent agrarian insurrection, generating a new Constitution in 1917, along with profound social and political changes⁹ (Fernandez, 2008). However, those changes did not include the end of the violence and discrimination against homosexual or transgender people, given the deep roots of Catholicism in the Mexican society, and the conservative sexual politics of the Revolutionary regime (Monsiváis, 2002). Even when it is hard to determine the exact number of deaths caused by this

9 One consequence of the Mexican Revolution was the creation of the PRI - '*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*' [Institutional Revolutionary Party] in 1928. This party held national power for more than 60 years, becoming a 'hegemonic party', controlling the local and federal governments and the legislative bodies through a 'perfect dictatorship'. Rampant corruption and impunity were characteristics of that political era, but violent repression and social support were enough to seize power until 1989. Social mobilizations were one of the key factors that made possible its temporal demise (Díaz-Cayeros, 2000). However, the PRI took the national government in 2012 again, with current president Enrique Peña Nieto, who has been involved in numerous scandals of corruption and human rights violations.

revolution, a recent study by Robert McCaa (2003) estimates that about 1,4 million lives were lost¹⁰ (p. 396).

In the case of Colombia, years after the enforcement of the ‘acceso carnal homosexual’ as criminal offense in 1936, the partisan confrontation between ‘Liberal’ and ‘Conservative’ political supporters reached a peak in Bogota, when the Liberal leader Jorge Eliecer Gaitan was murdered, in the afternoon of April 9th of 1948. That assassination unleashed the wrath of thousands of his supporters, who lynched his alleged murderer, started shooting people who wore blue clothes -the colour of the conservative flag- and set on fire the city tram, some cars, and many private buildings. That episode, known as The ‘*Bogotazo*,’ (See Fig. 4) was the symbolic beginning of a cruel and bloody period called The Violence, a partisan war between liberals and conservatives, which mutated later into the current armed conflict of more than 50 years between Marxist guerrillas, paramilitary forces and the national army¹¹ (Alape, 1994). According to recent research of *Grupo de Memoria Histórica* (2013) [Group of Historical Memory], it is estimated that 220.000 people died between January 1 of 1958 and December 31 of 2012 because of the armed conflict in Colombia (p. 31). At March 31 of 2013, 4’744.046 people had been forcibly displaced by any of the -legal or illegal- actors of the conflict (p. 33).

10 About masculinity and sexuality in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution, Macias-Gonzalez and Rubenstein (2012) argue:

The Revolution that brought the Porfiriato to an end –as with other total wars of the twentieth century throughout the world– brought with it a relaxation of the social and moral structure. Historians have noted how some women seized the chance to experiment with new forms of dress, comportment, behavior, and thought (though most simply scrambled to survive times of violence, death and chaos). Male leaders of various revolutionary factions, however –especially those like Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa followed by armies of peasants and indigenous people– tacitly accepted the Porfirian conflation of nation, state, family honor, and male power. Indeed, by arranging to be photographed, filmed and gossiped about in poses of exaggerated masculinity -wearing big hats, sporting large guns, and in Villa’s case surrounded by his many wives and even more children- these revolutionary heroes manipulated this masculine ideology. They seemed to be saying that their exaggerated manliness made up for their lesser class and ethnic status, marking them as true citizens of the nation they were hoping to remake (p. 18).

11 A recent study of the *Defensoría del Pueblo* (2015) [National Ombudsman] in Colombia shows that, on October 15 of 2015, 1.422 people identified themselves as part of the LGBTI population in the ‘*Red Nacional de Información de la Unidad de Víctimas*’ [National Information Network of the Victims Unit], just a fraction of the 7’470.057 victims of the Colombian armed conflict. As the *Defensoría* suggests, there is a critical underreport, which makes quite difficult to determine the actual number of victims with non-normative gender or sexualities (p. 17).

Figure 4. ‘Los difuntos del Bogotazo’ [The departed of the ‘Bogotazo’], (1948)



Amidst the widespread violence in Colombia, and according to the historical records currently available, the first initiative of a group of homosexual men was called The ‘*Felipitos*’, and it existed in Bogotá around the 1940s, bringing together a tiny group of upper-class young men in private venues. Although they had no interest in any political intervention pursuing homosexual liberation, it was probably the first social group articulated around that specific sexual orientation in the country (Figari, 2010, p. 227). In the meantime, in Mexico City appeared the first nightclubs for homosexual men, where there was space for trans women too, being spaces meant mainly for socialization (De la Dehesa, 2010, p. 16).

The following decades were times of turmoil and changes in many western countries, including Latin America. The 1960s were particularly crucial for these mobilizations, given the emergence of a ‘sexual revolution’ and the simultaneous agitation of the students’ movement in 1968. Nevertheless, Mexico was governed at this time by the reactionary regime of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, who was willing to use the violence to repress his political opposition, represented by the vocal and massive students’ mobilisation. As a result, on October 2nd of 1968, a meeting of thousands of students in the ‘*Plaza de las Tres Culturas*’ [Three Cultures Square] of Tlatelolco in Mexico City was abruptly interrupted by about 5000 members of police and army, who suddenly started shooting at the crowd. About 3000 people were arrested, and hundreds were killed (Poniatowska, 1975). There are precedents of violent repression of students’

mobilizations in other Latin American countries: in Colombia, during the dictatorship of Rojas Pinilla; in Argentina, during the regime of Rafael Videla; or in Chile, from the beginning of the regime of Augusto Pinochet. It is clear that, among the violent oppression, social mobilization has been an essential mechanism of resistance, even when life is put at risk. However, once there was a path opened by those brave activists, it was time for the secret struggles to arise.

3. The uprising of liberation

By the 1970s, years after the Tlatelolco massacre and the Stonewall riots, Mexican and Colombian mobilizations on gender and sexualities set off with new confidence, following the creation of the first homosexual organizations in Argentina and Brazil. In Mexico, the State irruptions on nightclubs and spaces for the socialization of homosexual men and women end up fostering new forms of organized collective action (De la Dehesa, 2010, p. 16). In that context, the Mexican '*Movimiento de Liberación Homosexual*' [Homosexual Liberation Movement] started activities in 1971; they had to operate secretly, given the high level of repression of the government. Their primary objective was gathering people to share their particular experiences related to their individual sexualities, analyzing its meaning and creating awareness about the importance of fighting 'auto-stigma'¹² and look for the acceptance of homosexuality as a legitimate expression of sexuality (Díez, 2011, p. 694).

In 1970, Colombian union leader, writer and intellectual León Zuleta created in Medellín the first political group of homosexual men of his country, the '*Movimiento de Liberación Homosexual*' [Homosexual Liberation Movement]¹³ (Salinas Hernández, 2010, p. 177). Some years later, he would organize in Bogotá, with activist Manuel Velandia, the '*GELG: Grupo de Encuentro por la Liberación de los Güeis*'¹⁴ [Meeting Group for the Gay Liberation], which first meeting took place on April 9 of 1977. This group

12 Translation of the Spanish expression '*auto-estigma*', used by Díez to describe one of the issues addressed by the organization, which was coherent with the psychological approach to sexuality –and homosexuality– widely accepted yet at that time.

13 Although Zuleta asserted in an interview that the '*Movimiento de Liberación Homosexual*' counted with about 10.000 members, he would later admit that he was the founder and only integrant of that organization for a long time (Velandia Mora, 2011).

14 Velandia explains the origin of the expression '*güei*' in the name of their organization: '[We did it] with an anti-American attitude -in fashion at that time- influenced by Zuleta, who propose to use '*güei*' instead of 'gay', and write it just as it is written in Spanish'.

summoned men of different occupations and political views, to discuss the relations between homosexuality with diverse subjects such as family, relationships, religion, State, Education, Law, Psychology and Psychiatry (Velandia Mora, 2011). Other organizations that emerged during that period were the '*Grupo de Estudio de la Cuestión Homosexual GRECO*' [Group of Study of the Homosexual Question] of Medellín -the first group open to gay men and lesbians-, '*Grupo Acuarios*' [Group Aquarius] of Bucaramanga, and unnamed groups in Armenia and Cali (Salinas Hernández, 2010, p. 178).

In the case of the mobilizations around gender and sexualities in Colombia and Mexico, one of the most remarkable was the first time that activists and organizations saw the light 'out of the closet'. In that sense, and according to Jordi Díez, the 'apparition' of the Mexican gay and lesbian movement, occurred in the afternoon of July 26 of 1978 (2011, p. 695). That very day a group of forty homosexuals, part of the '*FHAR Frente Homosexual de Acción Revolucionaria*' [Homosexual Revolutionary Action Front]¹⁵, joined a march commemorating the Cuban revolution (De la Dehesa, 2010, p. 17), against the repression of the national political regime, demanding the release of political prisoners (Díez, 2011, p. 695). The gay and lesbian collective carried banners, which demanded the 'liberation' of the homosexual citizens by the dominant repressive system. While some groups within the march supported their claims, others booed them (p. 687). Months later, on October 2 of the same year, the FHAR was joined by the other main organizations of the emerging movement: '*Grupo Lambda de Liberación Homosexual*' [Lambda Group of Homosexual Liberation], and '*Oikabeth*'¹⁶, and marched together in the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the *Tlatelolco* massacre (pp. 695-696). The following year, on the last week of June, a group of Mexican homosexuals held for the first time their annual '*marcha del orgullo*' [pride parade] in the main streets of Mexico City (p. 696). From that moment, the march has been carried out uninterruptedly year after year through the main avenue of the city¹⁷, becoming the oldest public demonstration of its kind in Latin America.

15 According to De la Dehesa, the FHAR 'was named for a French homosexual liberation group known for its radical politics'. He adds that the Front 'was comprised largely of gay men, though it would later include a few lesbians and a significant number of *vestidas* [transvestites]' (2010, p. 17).

16 The name of the group '*Oikabeth*' comes from the Mayan expression '*olling iskan katuntat bebeth thot*', which means 'warrior women who open the way pouring flowers'. It was comprised exclusively of women, replacing the lesbian group '*Lesbos*', created by Yan Maria Castro (Díez, 2011, p. 695).

17 According to Díez, during the first march the demonstrators could not use the '*Paseo de la Reforma*', the main avenue of Mexico City, as they usually do. As Ian Lumsden documented Lumsdenit (as cited in Díez, 2011), the high level of rejection to the march led the City government to deny the permission to march through the '*Paseo de la Reforma*' and forced them to use '*Río Lerma*' instead,

Figure 5. First Public Appearance of the Homosexual Liberation organizations in Mexico City. Unknown (1978)



Going back in time, on June 28 of 1977, the '*Día Gay Internacional*' [International Gay Day] was organized for the first time in Colombia, as a private event, which included parties, conferences, and workshops. In 1980, the first public appearance of the Colombian movement took place in Bogotá in 1982, and it was named '*Marcha del Orgullo Homosexual*' [March of the Homosexual Pride] (See Fig. 6). This parade had only 32 participants, with the presence of almost 100 police officers (Velandia Mora, 2011), being the first and only march of the 1980s in the country. Unlike Mexico, the second march of this kind held in Colombia took place just until 1996 in Bogotá, 14 years later. According to Velandia Mora, the reasons for that long hiatus were several. One of them was the HIV/AIDS crisis, which demanded the energy and efforts of the few visible leaders of the movement at the time. Another, related to the apparition of the HIV/AIDS was the strong stigmatization of gay men, which made the organization of these sorts of public events risky and controversial. A key risk was becoming the target of any of the perpetrators of the armed conflict, mostly the paramilitary forces¹⁸, which have been threatening and killing homosexual people for decades¹⁹.

a secondary street (p. 696).

18 Social activists from the left wing, like women, labor and homosexual activists are some of the main targets of the paramilitaries. Manuel Velandia Mora, one of the founders of the homosexual movement in Colombia, is currently exiled in Spain since 2007 due to death threats against him and his family, and an attempt on his life by the paramilitary forces in 2002 (Valdes, 2010).

19 According to a recent report of the '*Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica*' [Historical Memory National Centre] (2015) about the histories of the LGBT population in the armed conflict in Colombia, even when there are cases of violence against this vulnerable population perpetrated by virtually all the actors of the conflict (guerrillas, paramilitaries, police, and army), in most of them the para-

Figure 6. First March of the International Homosexual Day in Bogota (Colombia). Unknown (1982)



The question about the ideological background of these first organizations in Colombia and Mexico is complex. According to José Fernando Serrano (2012), a small and short-lived publication written by Leon Zuleta called *'El Otro'* [The Other], could give some clues about what the ideology behind the Colombian *'Movimiento de Liberación Homosexual'* was. In *'El Otro'*, the idea of liberation was a project of sexual ethic different from the one that emerged from the model of identity politics in the global North marked by ideas such as 'coming out of the closet', 'gay pride', the release of repression or the total acceptance in society. Rather, in *'El Otro'* is possible to trace a concern -present in other Latin American mobilizations of the early seventies- for the connections between political revolution and sexual liberation. For intellectuals and activists of such mobilizations, sexual liberation was not a by-product of the political revolution, as suggested by mainstream leftist movements. Nor was his priority the search for identity and the creation of a gay collective subject as the first step for sexual and political liberation. Rather, the ethical project that was drawn in *'El Otro'*, as in other of his contemporaries, proposed a fusion between political revolution and sexual liberation that called into question the linear systems, both of the leftist movements and the gay liberation movements emerged in Europe or the United States. However, this idea of homosexual liberation, in the case of Colombia, was a project that failed to materialize. The project of sexual liberation expressed in

military was to blame (p. 100).

'*El Otro*' initially imbricated and joined with the logic of gay rights in expansion at the beginning of the eighties. Then it turned away from it and disappeared (pp. 24-25).

As Serrano argues, the project of 'homosexual liberation' proposed by Zuleta -which lies in the roots of the Colombian gender and sexualities movement- took some critical distance from the mobilizations developed in the U.S. and Europe. His project was more radical, related to Zuleta's affinity with Trotskyism and his ambitions of a wider and deeper revolution. Certain factions of other liberation fronts and movements in Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina, where those debates were open, shared these aims. However, as Serrano notes it, this radical thought was not appealing to the mainstream movement, and Zuleta's projects of liberation ended up immersed in more pragmatic and concrete objectives²⁰. One of those new strategies was the legislative lobby, driven by members of the movement, to achieve the decriminalization of homosexuality in the Penal Code of 1980. According to Velandia Mora (2011), their success in such initiative allowed their first public appearance as a movement in 1982, with the permission and protection of the police, given that homosexuality was no longer a criminal offence. This legal achievement supported their fight against police raids in gay bars and clubs, even when they had no legal protection against violence or discrimination. That was probably the turning point of the course of the mobilizations on gender and sexualities in Colombia, since their main strategy became more liberal and less radical, reflected on the pursuit of State recognition and protection for people with non-normative gender and sexualities in the legal and political arena.

In the case of Mexico, their seminal organization, Mexican '*Movimiento de Liberación Homosexual*', embraced the foreign ideological influence coming from the U.S. and Europe, pursuing an ideal of liberation in tune with the struggles that had been taken place in the global north (Díez, 2011, p. 694). To understand the ideological background of the Mexican movement at this early stage, Díez (2011) address the configuration of their main organisations. The FHAR, the most countercultural group of them, consisted mostly of men, and their members sympathized with communism and anarchism. Members of Lambda were men and women, mainly of the middle class. Even when they shared some perspectives with FHAR, Lambda adopted a feminist vision and a more pragmatic posture. Meanwhile, Oikabeth was formed exclusively by lesbians, and it would be the group with the most explicit ideological foundations, based on lesbo-feminist principles (p. 695).

20 On February 24 of 1993, Leon Zuleta was found dead in his apartment in Medellín, with several stab wounds on his body. Although he had received some death threats of paramilitary '*grupos de limpieza social*' [social cleaning groups], because of his sexuality and political activism, the police investigators discarded them and classified it as a crime of passion (R. Vargas, 2012).

Despite their heterogeneity, these organizations were articulated around a discourse of liberation, which most memorable slogans were '*no hay libertad política sin libertad sexual*' [there is no political freedom without sexual freedom], '*en mi cama mando yo*' [I command in my bed]²¹, and '*lo personal es político*' [the personal is political] (Díez, 2011, p. 696). However, that articulation and harmony collapsed in 1982, when deep disagreements occurred between those organizations. The movement suffered a fatal division between those who bet for a revolutionary social change -radicals- and others, as members of Lambda, who advocated for socio-political changes through the existent system -reformists- Feminism also had an essential role in this division. Oikabeth and Lambda adopted a feminist posture from the start. However, members of Oikabeth considered themselves more feminists than lesbians, an opposite position to FHAR, whose members rejected feminism as part of their political struggle. So, while liberation from oppression was the identity axis during the first phase of the movement, the lack of agreements about the meaning of the homosexual mobilization made challenging to keep a collective identity of the movement, because it was fractured (Díez, 2011, pp. 699-700).

In the cases of Colombia and Mexico, the 'homosexual liberation', as a collective identity for the early phase of the mobilizations on gender and sexualities, became obsolete in the middle of the 1980s. One of the reasons argued was its inability to offer concrete strategies facing violence and discrimination, beyond the early acts of visibilization through 'pride parades' and other public manifestations. And the other was the substantial introduction of the liberal discourse of human rights and citizenship, which encouraged a closer dialogue and negotiations with the State.

21 This was one of the most popular slogans displayed on the public marches, claiming for a sexual and political liberation from the State intromission in the private lives of gay, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people. At the same time, this was a call to stop the police harassment and extortion against gay and lesbian people, who lived with the fear of being discovered. One particular press article reflects on this subject. According to the digital newspaper Proceso (2010), being gay or lesbian in the seventies in Mexico City was not easy. Arturo Durazo, as head of the police, led raids that ended with scandalous headlines in the tabloids: '40 *'mariposones*' [fairies] are caught!' '30 *'locas*' [queers] are arrested!' The police seemed to have developed a peculiar ability to detect gay and lesbians, pursue them, hunt them down and finally achieve their ultimate goal: blackmail. The policemen had a peculiar nose to detect the 'gay perfumes': their swagger, their lightly plucked eyebrows, their hair neatly cut, their perfect nail polish, or even an unusual highlight in hair... And then, the threat: 'we are going to tell your parents, your boss, your family'. 'It was an extraordinarily violent time for homosexuals, we were an industry to police and extortionists, because once you were fished they grabbed your contact book, and they had additional names to yours; if you lived alone they plundered you and visited you regularly not to expose you, and besides they could hit you, humiliate you, and raped you. They did what they pleased!' recalls Juan Jacobo Hernandez, one of the few to attend the first gay parade in 1978, and who is recognized as the leader of the movement who has better documentation.

4. A complex crisis

The 1980s and part of the 1990s were challenging times for the blooming mobilizations around gender and sexualities around the world, and the Colombian and Mexican movements were not the exception. In the case of Mexico, the formidable movement emerged during the 1970s, experienced a profound crisis during the 1980s. According to De la Dehesa (2010), the Mexican movement had a pronounced decline since the mid-1980s, mostly due to two factors. The first one was the debt crisis and early neoliberal structural adjustment policies, which affected numerous activists and organizations. The second one was the apparition of HIV/AIDS, which cost the lives of many activists and fostered a reorientation of efforts among gay men, who established the first AIDS NGOs in the country, such as Calamo in 1985; these moves established a model of activism increasingly crucial in the 1990s (p. 18). However, as De la Dehesa point out, Mexican lesbian activism resisted the crisis. In part, the resilience of the lesbian organizations was due to their activists' mobilization for the First Conference of Latin American and Caribbean Lesbians, and the Fourth Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Conference in 1987. Besides, another factor that helped lesbian activism to survive was their articulation with a broader feminist movement (2010, p. 19).

In the Colombian mobilizations around gender and sexualities, the 1980s were times of growth and ebbs. According to Salinas (2010), two of the first landmarks of the decade for the movement were the consolidation of the '*Movimiento de Liberación Homosexual Colombiano*' [Colombian Homosexual Liberation Movement] in 1980, and the publication in the same year of '*Homofilia y homofobia: estudio sobre la homosexualidad, la bisexualidad y la represión de la conducta homosexual*' [Homophilia and Homophobia: Study on Homosexuality, Bisexuality, and the Repression of the Homosexual Behaviour] by Ebel Botero, being the first book on the subject produced in Colombia. In 1982, the '*Instituto Lambda Colombiano*' [Colombian Lambda Institute] was created as a research centre dedicated to homosexual issues, which theoretical reflections were the feeding of the magazine '*Ventana Gay*' [Gay Window] (p. 179).

As it was referenced previously, in 1982, the first '*Marcha del Orgullo Homosexual*' [Homosexual Pride March] took place in Bogota. Besides the reasons exposed by Velandía, the temporary disappearance of this march was the sign of a new approach assumed by the movement, which allowed them to survive the turmoil of political violence and the HIV/AIDS crisis during the 1980s and part of the 1990s. In order to face this situation, according to Salinas (2010), the movement created a political

strategy of articulation with other sectors and social movements in Colombia, which allowed them, at the same time, to keep their claims on the public sphere and establishing links that would prevent their self-marginalization (p. 180). In that sense, Gamez (as cited in Salinas Hernández, 2010) presents the testimony of one of the protagonists of that event. The interviewee asserted that the march of 1982 was the first and the only of the decade as a homosexual movement because they decided that gay marches should not exist because it was self-discriminatory. Furthermore, according to Gamez, instead of a gay march leaders encouraged their members to join events like the marches of workers and unions the First of May, Labor Day, as ‘contingents of homosexual workers’, and they started joining to the demonstrations of students from public universities, which opened opportunities for the homosexuals to get a space (p. 180).

Moreover, the reaction to the HIV/AIDS crisis in the Mexican and Colombian movements was different. In Mexico, according to Díez (2011), the strong stigmatization of homosexuality caused by the initial reports of AIDS as a ‘gay plague’ or ‘pink cancer’, led to a drastic shift of their mobilizations. The visibility of the movement stopped, and their mobilization suffered a turn inwards. The new groups formed at that time, *Colectivo Sol* [Collective Sun], *Guerrilla Gay* [Gay Guerrilla] and a few years later, *Cálamo* [Calamus], were given the task of organizing events for information, social support and fundraising to assist victims. Thus, the movement passed from liberation to survival. Perhaps nothing exemplifies better the change between these two stages of the movement than the disintegration of the historical group FHAR [Homosexual Front of Revolutionary Action] and its replacement by the *Colectivo Sol*, group devoted exclusively to collect information about the disease and its spread in the community, and to facilitate the provision of medical services to homosexuals who have the disease. During that time, there was a debate within the movement onto whether to adopt the ‘gay’ word rather than homosexual, as a political affirmation of assumption of identity (which the American movement did during the decade of the eighties), but the AIDS epidemic and the practical needs it brought precluded the collective identification through this concept (p. 702).

While the Mexican claims for the liberation of gay and lesbians were silenced by 1984, in the Colombian movement there was no agreement on what should be the right approach to face the HIV/AIDS crisis. According to Manuel Velandia (as cited in Salinas Hernández, 2010), who has been a prominent AIDS activist in the country, this dilemma caused a division within the movement. In Colombia, in 1983, the *Movimiento de Liberación Homosexual Colombiano MLHC* [Colombian Homosexual Liberation Movement] meets to mark the day of homosexual pride, and in its deliberation was discussed whether AIDS was a public health problem of the magnitude

to be taken as a flagship theme of the movement's work the following year; two alternatives were proposed: one, yes it is, and the movement must turn to such scope because it will affect the lives of hundreds or thousands of homosexuals; the other, that AIDS was a single event that would affect the American people, and as such, should not be a priority. The consensus was given to the second option (p. 181).

However, despite the initial skepticism, many activists part of the Colombian movement end up deploying an arduous work in response to the pandemic. According to Corredor & Ramirez (as cited in Salinas Hernández, 2010), those efforts had a double impact in the course of the mobilizations. On the one hand, AIDS becomes an articulator factor, creates support networks throughout the country, and homosexual men begin to work together and make alliances with other sectors -even sectors of the State- as the Health Ministry; gay sexuality and identity become visible to the rest of society, but with a great deal of stigma. Besides, also becomes visible the proactive capacity and leadership of a 'minority' sector in solving a problem that, despite what had been said, was not unique to them (p. 181).

5. Change and new engagements

Despite the revolutionary calls of the Gay and Homosexual Liberation Fronts, the end of the 1970s and beginnings of the 1980s would mark a radical shift from the leftist demands to the liberal rights-based discourse. This shift implied a significant involvement of the gender and sexualities mobilizations in broader debates on the construction and configuration of democracy and citizenship (Chesters, 2011, p. 115). Those transformations entailed significant changes in their objectives, aiming to decriminalize homosexuality, and ensure the recognition of fundamental legal guarantees and more formal rights for the emergent sexual citizens. As De la Dehesa (2010) asserts, Latin American mobilizations took that direction, involving their significant organizations and activists in the deployment of new strategies to establish a productive dialogue with the State (p. 5). In this sense, he argues:

I underscore how rival sectors in early movements in Brazil and Mexico drew on Marxist, liberationist, and liberal strands of modernity, and transnational repertoires associated with each, to frame sexual politics in very different ways. One of the central changes in both countries during the 1980s was a paradigm shift from homosexual liberation to homosexual rights. This move found parallels in other parts of the world and coincided

with the declining strength of the Marxist left as a global alternative and the demobilizing impact of the debt crisis on Latin America. At stake in this shift was a transformation in activists' goals and tactics entailing greater prioritization of state-directed efforts and a narrowing of their agendas from transforming broader relations of power in society and gaining social acceptance to an emphasis on legally enforced tolerance (p. 5).

The current prevalence of this liberal paradigm leads to reflect on the main reasons for its emergence and consolidation as a central strategy in the activist toolbox. Three factors paved the way for the shift from 'homosexual liberation' to 'gay rights' in Latin America, and specifically in Colombia and Mexico. These phenomena concurred as part -and the result- of the 1980s crisis of the gender and sexualities mobilizations, which forced the liberationist discourse out of the limelight and opened the space for new paradigms. The first one was the inability of the early groups and activists to forge a post-liberationist identity. According to Díez (2011), the internal disagreements between different sectors of the young movement mostly originated in dissonant ideological and strategic approaches, made impossible to articulate a common discourse to overcome the sole claim for liberation and respond to the new local realities (p. 700). As Claudia Hinojosa (as cited in Díez, 2011), an early Mexican activist, asserted concerning the poor answer of the movement during the 1980's economic crisis: 'We didn't manage to use the proper language to address that terrible crisis. We didn't see the connections between our struggle and wider changes. If we'd hooked our claim with the economics, but we couldn't. The liberationist language was not enough. Here we are, liberated, now what?' (p. 700). However, an interesting twist happened during the 1990s, when the relatively fresh ideas of the queer theory were positively accepted by many scholars and activists working with issues of gender and sexuality in Mexico. Leaders of the Mexican movement were then influenced both by concepts of queer theory and the strategic changes of the US movement, and decided to embrace as a new identity the concept of '*diversidad sexual*' [sexual diversity], which became a label for their new political claims: '*el derecho a la diversidad sexual*' [right to sexual diversity] (p. 706).

The second factor involved in such shift was the definite uprising of the human rights discourse. According to Díez (2011), the rights component, part of this new conceptualization, is closely related with the international ascension of the human rights discourse on the 1990s. The end of the 'cold war' gave a paradigmatic advantage to the liberal discourse, anchored to the notion of human rights, which was adopted gradually by members of social movements in countries where a transition to democracy was taking place, and by international institutions such as United Nations (p. 706). Michael Ignatieff

(as cited in Díez, 2011) called this phenomenon ‘the human rights revolution’ (p. 707). In the case of Mexico, as this discourse started to be adopted -formally- by the government, members of the organized civil society embrace it as a tool in the struggle for the democratization. This discourse gave discursive foundations to a wide range of social movements and among them the lesbian and gay movement (Díez, 2011, p. 707).

Also, a third factor that influenced the shift towards a liberal rights-based approach in the mobilizations around gender and sexualities in Colombia and Mexico, as in many other countries, was the HIV/AIDS crisis. According to Díez (2015a), in several countries of Latin America, ‘HIV/AIDS allowed many activists to begin to frame their demands as an issue of rights. As the disease ravaged on, (mostly) gay men began to mobilize around the concept of the right to health care and to transform a victimization discourse into one that placed responsibility for the containment of the disease on the state’ (p. 861).

Despite some troubling aspects of this current paradigm, these liberal mobilizations on gender and sexualities in Latin America have prompted substantial changes. One of them was the actual exclusion of homosexuality as a criminal offence²², as well as the constitutional and legal protection against discrimination based on gender and sexuality. Since the crisis of the 1980s, some organizations worked to bring awareness, fight stigma and achieve public funding of HIV/AIDS treatments in most countries of the region²³. Also, more recently, those activists and organizations have made possible some legal recognition for same-sex couples -including marriage and

22 Although most of the Latin American countries have decriminalised homosexuality, not all of them introduced that legal change at the same time or with the same conditions. In the cases of Argentina (1887), Brazil (1831), El Salvador (1800s), Guatemala (1800s), Haiti (1800s), Honduras (1899), Mexico (1872), Paraguay (1880), Peru (1836-1837), Dominican Republic (1882), Surinam (1869), Uruguay (1934) and Venezuela (1800s), decriminalization was introduced long time before the emergence of the current mobilizations around gender and sexualities. In the cases of Bahamas (1991), Chile (1999), Colombia (1981), Costa Rica (1971), Cuba (1979), Ecuador (1997), Nicaragua (2008), and Panama (2008), the exclusion of homosexuality as a criminal offense came in the context of local mobilizations for the rights of gay, lesbian and bisexual citizens (Carroll, 2015, p. 29).

23 The first Latin American country to guarantee public funding for HIV/AIDS treatment was Brazil in 1996, after a progressive judicial decision and the Decree-Law 9313 of October 1996, which universalize the access to antiretroviral medication in the country (CEJIL, 2002, p. 10). This recognition and ongoing support for people living with HIV/AIDS were possible for the impulse and intervention of activists and organizations part of the ‘*Movimento Homossexual no Brasil*’ [Homosexual Movement of Brazil] (Facchini, 2003, p. 109).

adoption-, legal protection for transgender and intersexual people, and public policies with a differential focus based on gender and sexuality²⁴.

Although several countries of Latin America, such as Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, and Mexico, have some of the most progressive legislations in the field of gender and sexuality, most of the continent has a long way to go. 11 countries -most of them part of the Caribbean- criminalise homosexuality, and 23 countries -out of 46- do not have any legal protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity (ILGA, 2015). The mobilizations around gender and sexualities in the region face many challenges, such as a high rate of hate crimes against gay, lesbian and bisexual people, but mostly affecting the transgender population²⁵. Legal, social and domestic discrimination against the LGBTI population are still a bitter reality, along with the pathologisation of the transgender and intersexual identities, and the religious persecution of people with non-normative gender or sexualities.

Regarding the terms of engagement of the Colombian and Mexican movements with the State, there are some important considerations to take into account. One of them is that part of that engagement was due to the movements' response to the HIV/AIDS crisis. De la Dehesa (2010) considers that the resurgence of activism since the 1990s 'was in part because AIDS made homosexuality a topic of public interest and opened new sources of funding from the state and international financial agencies and foundations' (p. 19). This situation led many activists and groups to create NGOs and other organizations devoted to provide support to people living with the virus or the syndrome or to work in policy-making and legislative lobby to achieve legal protection for this vulnerable population. These interventions produced several outcomes. In that sense, Díez (2015a) argues that:

The ability of gay activists to induce policy response to HIV/AIDS issues varied across the region. In cases such as Argentina, activists managed to force the government to pass legislation fairly early on (1991) to fight the epidemic, which became central for the distribution of antiretroviral

24 Several countries of the region, like Colombia, Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina have public policies, at the local and national level, which aim to protect their citizens against discrimination and violence based on sexual orientation, gender or sexual identity, including specific aspects like education, work, health, and social support (Pecheny, 2009).

25 According to Transgender Europe (2015), 1731 murders against trans people were reported in the world between January 2008 and December 2014. 1350 of them happened in Latin America. It means, 8 out of 10 deaths of trans people reported in that period occurred in that region. The countries with most cases were Brazil (689), Mexico (194), Colombia (85), Venezuela (85) and Honduras (77).

drugs when they became available in the mid-1990s. In Brazil and Mexico, legislative change in the mid-1990s made the drugs universally available to those infected. In other cases, such as Chile, it would not be until 2001 that the government would enact legislation, but even then, it did not adopt a universality principle. (p. 861)

After the successful intervention of activists in response to the HIV/AIDS crisis in several countries of Latin America, it results necessary to analyze further implications of their engagement with the State. After the 1990s resurgence of the movement, legislative activism became a priority in the Colombian and Mexican mobilizations. Even more, according to Díez (2015a):

Since the early 2000s, certain currents within the gay and lesbian activism in Latin America have focused most of the attention to the push for policy reform and had, therefore, states as the sites of their struggles. [...] The factors behind the ability of Latin American gay and lesbian activists to attain such unprecedented policy changes vary across the region. Scholarship on these developments has identified a variety of factors, which have been central, such as: cross-movement and international alliances in pushing for policy reform; access to financial resources, which has allowed them to institutionalize and professionalize their activities; the establishment of extensive networks of allies, inside and outside the state, which have supported their efforts; a decrease in homophobia levels across the region; and the framing of their demands for fuller conceptions of sexual citizenship, which have resonated in countries in which process of democratization continues to unfold. (p. 862).

6. Final thoughts

Being this text a mere outline of the complex trajectories of the local mobilizations around gender and sexualities in Colombia and Mexico, in this section, the main ideas developed throughout this chapter will be highlighted. As it was presented, the largest Latin American countries have a longstanding tradition of social resistance, held by the struggles of their social movements -indigenous, afro-descendent, women, labor- being the mobilizations around gender and sexualities a relatively new addition, although a successful one. Both Colombia and Mexico, two countries with an outstanding influence of the Catholic church and a long history of structural violence, witnessed the early emergence of these mobilizations as a path of resistance

to the generalized brutality and relentless persecution against those with non-normative sexual orientation and gender identity. In the earliest times of such mobilizations, the first organizations and activists regarded their approach of resistance as a struggle for liberation; the ideological background of these first initiatives was diverse, although there was a particular affinity to ideas from anarchism, Marxism, and an undeniable influence and support from the feminist theory and movement. From the beginning, it has been a heterogeneous movement with internal tensions and divergences that led to essential opportunities of articulation -such as the first marches- and ruptures -such as the separation of gay and lesbian initiatives-. Possibly the largest and most complex crisis these mobilizations had to endure world-wide was the HIV/AIDS outbreak. The case of these countries was no different, and this emergency impacted at large all the early efforts for liberation and visibility. This crisis demanded a convergence of those activists and organizations to support the victims of this public health crisis, to learn and educate society about it, and to fight the stigma surrounding them. Another consequence of the HIV/AIDS crisis was a shift of their approach -from homosexual liberation towards a liberal rights-based strategy-, prompting a closer dialogue between the State and organizations, a demand for legal recognition and public policies, and a widespread adoption of a human rights discourse by the recently deemed 'LGBTI' collective.

A final exhortation in the current context of these countries would be to keep a critical distance towards the recent legal and political triumphs the 'LGBTI' movement have achieved in their struggles against violence and discrimination based on gender and sexuality. Although the recognition of gender identity and anti-discrimination bills, same-sex marriage, adoption by same-sex couples, and the progression towards legal equality for LGBTI people, have brought benefits for many, the limitations of this legal strategy are evident. Something that laws and public policies cannot achieve by themselves is a structural transformation of homophobic and transphobic violence and negative attitudes. Rights and legal protection are just a step towards a more respectful society, where people can live and love without fear. There is still so much more to be done, and activist initiatives in the fields of education, arts, and community-based work deserve all the support that society, organizations, institutions and the State could offer.



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