"Todos/as somos 41": The Dance of the Forty-One from Homosexual Reappropriation to Transgender Representation in Mexico, 1945–2001

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In a scene from Eduardo A. Castrejón's 1906 *Los cuarenta y uno: Novela crítico-social* (The forty-one: A novel of social criticism), the character Mimí sashays around the chandeliered ballroom arm in arm with his escort, Ninón, while the magnificent lights from the candelabras accentuate his padded hips. He greets spectators with a coquettish grin; his hair and makeup are meticulously done. The enthusiastic applause his entrance receives soon fades as the orchestra plays a heartfelt ballad that mixes in the air with the perfume of the gardenias and daisies. Expensive wine and Champagne flow as the roughly forty-one male guests dance through the night. Nineteen of them wear elegant European women's clothing and fine jewelry, while the rest have donned expensive tuxedos and white gloves. Although the orchestra blares loudly enough to mask the shuffling of guns and batons outside the house, it cannot muffle an alarmed shriek: "The police!! The gendarmes are knocking at the door!!!" Chaos erupts as police burst into the ballroom of the house. Disgusted upon learning that almost half of the guests are men dressed as women, the armed guards proceed to arrest everyone in sight. Mimí sobs as he is taken to the precinct. Abandoned emotionally by Ninón upon their deportation to the Yucatán, melancholia becomes his escort.[1]

The Dance of the Forty-One, the actual event upon which Castrejón's novel is based, remains one of the most scandalous episodes in Mexican history. Media coverage of the arrests exploded during the authoritarian regime of President José de la Cruz Porfirio Díaz (1876–1911), a period known as the Porfiriato dictatorship and characterized by economic growth

[1] Regarding Mimí's gender identity, Castrejón uses the male pronoun throughout the novel, even when Mimí is dressed in women's clothing. Eduardo A. Castrejón, *Los cuarenta y uno: Novela crítico-social* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Coordinación de Difusión Cultural, Dirección de Literatura, 2010).

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and foreign investment alongside political and social repression. According to what can be reconstructed from existing documentation, we know that in the early hours of 17 November 1901, police raided a male-only private party on La Paz Street in Mexico City and arrested the forty-one guests. When it came to light that roughly half of the men were dressed in women's clothing and that many in attendance were supposedly from some of the most elite families in the city, mainstream middle-class newspapers dedicated endless column space to providing readers with exhaustive details. One rumor in particular identified Ignacio de la Torre, son-in-law of Porfirio Díaz, as a participant in the ball.[2] Circulating alongside such gossip were broadsheets containing the lyrics of *corridos* (ballads) about the dance illustrated with etchings by the renowned printmaker José Guadalupe Posada; these remain some of the most recognizable images associated with the event (fig. 1).[3]

Seven of the detainees were able to gain *amparos* (constitutional protection) with the support of their families.[4] But for those without resources or connections, various punishments followed. The governor of Mexico City and future vice presidential candidate, Ramón Corral, sent the twenty-two tuxedoed men to the Twenty-Fourth Battalion's barracks, where their heads were shaved and they remained incarcerated. He reserved a more stringent sentence for the men in drag, who were exiled to the Yucatán Peninsula, where they performed hard labor as conscripts in Díaz's armies during the final days of the Maya Caste War (1847–1901). This was all in spite of the fact that their actions did not violate Mexico's Civil Code. By the end of the year, the scandal was firmly entrenched in popular memory, and the offenders were collectively remembered as "los cuarenta y uno" (the Forty-One). Castrejón's novel follows the fate of Mimí only up to his arrival at the Yucatán, squalid and malnourished, and his ultimate fate is left unresolved. We know little else about how the real Forty-One fared.

Due to the shocking nature of the event, the Forty-One have received significant attention as actors in a watershed moment of modern homosexuality in Mexico—an exceptional case of scandal during a regime defined

[2] Carlos Monsiváis, "The 41 and the *Gran Redada*," in *The Famous 41: Sexuality and Social Control in Mexico, c. 1901*, ed. Robert McKee Irwin, Edward J. McCaughan, and Michelle Rocío Nasser (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 148.

[3] Broadsheets were cheap, single-page periodicals with images meant for a mass, working-class audience of both literate and illiterate laborers to get quick information on crimes, cultural events, and politics. They tended to float in the streets and factories alongside penny-press publications that had a circulation of anywhere between nineteen thousand and forty thousand. For more information on Posada prints and broadsheets, see María Elena Díaz, "Cultura política y periodismo popular en el México de principios de siglo: La prensa satírica para obreros," in *Posada y la prensa ilustrada: Signos de modernización y resistencias: Museo nacional de arte, Julio–Octubre, 1996* (Mexico City: Patronato del Museo Nacional de Arte, Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1996), 89–101.

[4] Antonio Bertrán, "Un hito en la historia LGBT," *Reforma*, 17 December 2016, 23.

Figure 1. "Los 41 maricones, muy chulos y coquetones." Courtesy of the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.

by them.[5] In the words of famed essayist Carlos Monsiváis, "the Redada [raid] 'invents' homosexuality in Mexico."[6] Though we do not know how the Forty-One self-identified, scholars such as Robert McKee Irwin have studied how they were perceived in the popular press by analyzing the discourse and images in newspaper columns that covered the event in 1901. These early sources constructed homosexuality as a moral failing, a lapse in judgment, and even a bad habit, all linked to effeminacy, degeneracy,

[5] Ricardo Pérez Montfort, Alberto del Castillo, and Pablo Piccato, *Hábitos, normas y escándalo: Prensa, criminalidad y drogas durante el porfiriato tardío* (Mexico City: CIESAS, 1997); William H. Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club and Other Episodes of Porfirian Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004); James Alex Garza, *The Imagined Underworld: Sex, Crime, and Vice in Porfirian Mexico City* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007).

[6] Monsiváis, "The 41 and the *Gran Redada*," 164.

and cross-dressing.[7] Scholars have also shown how the scandal presented an opportunity for political and social criticism during a time of heavy censorship, as opposition newspapers and penny press editors used it to advocate for press freedoms and to contest bourgeois social domination.[8] Especially in the final years of the dictatorship, accusations of homosexuality became a powerful discursive tool against regime elites.[9] Finally, the Forty-One have served as a lens through which to explore the dynamics of homosocial circles and homoerotic spaces in Porfirian Mexico and to trace the connections made by early criminologists between male homosexuality and delinquency.[10]

In the decades following the scandal, the story of the Forty-One was also deployed in the service of the masculinist and heterosexist cultural nationalism that emerged in the wake of the Mexican Revolution (1910–20). The Mexican state's partnering with artists and intellectuals following the revolution gave way to aggressive feuds over the country's masculine aesthetic, culture of virility, and tendency to repress what were viewed as effeminate and decadent legacies of the Porfirian past.[11] A painting by Antonio M. Ruiz (known as "el Corzo") titled *Los paranoicos, los espiritifláuticos, los megalómanos* (The paranoid ones, the skinny ones, the megalomaniacs, circa 1941–42) was one site of these conflicts. Featuring members of Mexico City's intellectual and cultural elite, including the prominent writer Salvador Novo, the painting also displayed the number 41 in an apparent insult to the group's dandyism and cosmopolitanism. Allusions to the Forty-One

[7] Robert McKee Irwin, "The Centenary of the Famous 41," in Irwin, McCaughan, and Nasser, *The Famous 41*, 177–82.

[8] Robert McKee Irwin, "The Famous 41: The Scandalous Birth of Modern Mexican Homosexuality," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 6, no. 3 (2000): 361; Robert Buffington, "Homophobia and the Mexican Working Class, 1900–1910," in Irwin, McCaughan, and Nasser, *The Famous 41*, 195. For a more general account of the press under the Porfiriato, see Pablo Piccato, *The Tyranny of Opinion: Honor in the Construction of the Mexican Public Sphere* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

[9] Víctor M. Macías-González and Anne Rubenstein, "Introduction: Masculinity and History in Modern Mexico," in *Masculinity and Sexuality in Modern Mexico*, ed. Víctor M. Macías-González and Anne Rubenstein (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012), 10.

[10] Víctor M. Macías-González, "A Note on Homosexuality in Porfirian and Postrevolutionary Northern Mexico," *Journal of the Southwest* 43, no. 4 (2001): 543–48; Robert McKee Irwin, *Mexican Masculinities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Robert Buffington, *Criminal and Citizen in Modern Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

[11] Daniel Balderston, "Poetry, Revolution, Homophobia: Polemics from the Mexican Revolution," in *Hispanisms and Homosexualities*, ed. Sylvia Molloy and Robert McKee Irwin (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 57; John Lear, *Picturing the Proletariat: Artists and Labor in Revolutionary Mexico, 1908–1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016), 109–10; Mary K. Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis, introduction to *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920–1940,* ed. Mary K. Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 14–15; Irwin, *Mexican Masculinities*, 116–85.

thus became tools in the process of revolutionary nation building through the vilification of the memory of the Porfiriato.[12]

The Forty-One's legacy is, nevertheless, a conflicted one. While stigma surrounding the case made the number a symbol of degeneracy and deviancy, by the end of the century *discotecas* (nightclubs) in Mexico City were carrying the name "41," while sexual rights advocates began citing the event as a key moment in Mexican LGBTTTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, *travesti*, and intersex) history.[13] The scandal's enduring notoriety, coupled with the diverse appropriations of its memory, thus requires further exploration. Doing so will reveal a history of the Forty-One that is neither solely about stigma and repression nor exclusively tied to male homosexuality. I argue that contestations by elite state and cultural actors and activists from the 1940s through the 1970s to remove the stigma and shame associated with the Forty-One began a process of homosexual identity formation and liberation that eventually enabled the proliferation of new and radical modes of representation and community dialogue by the end of the century. The symbolism and memory of the Forty-One offered an opportunity for the portrayal of sexual desires in magazines and erotica that defied dominant notions of sexual and aesthetic hierarchy. During the 1980s and early 1990s, the memory helped to introduce the notion of healthy bodies and the importance of alternative sexual practices in the aftermath of the HIV/AIDS crisis, while in the late 1990s and early 2000s the Forty-One's symbolism emphasized the eroticism of transgender bodies and the viewing pleasure of women.[14]

Castrejón's 1906 novel is just one of the many cultural artifacts produced throughout the twentieth century that invoke the memory of the Forty-One. Others include memoirs, archival prints, magazines, and even a 1990 day planner. Such cultural artifacts and icons have proven to be productive evidence for tracing the development of Mexican national identity.[15] Artifacts can also

[12] Carlos Monsiváis, "Introduction: The Sidelong World Where Confession and Proclamation Are Compounded," in *Pillar of Salt: An Autobiography with 19 Erotic Sonnets*, by Salvador Novo, trans. Marguerite Feitlowitz (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 21.

[13] In Mexico, the abbreviation LGBTTTI is more commonly used than LGBTQ. "¿Qué significa LGBTTTI?," *El Universal*, 24 June 2017.

[14] In this article, I use the term "transgender" in the broadest possible sense, "to understand a wide variety of identities and expressions that cut across, move between, or otherwise destabilize the dominant gender binary, including but not limited to male-to-female and female-to-male transsexuals, who seek to transition to the gender 'opposite' the one assigned at birth through cosmetic and in some instances chemical or surgical means." Whenever possible, I will employ the diverse terminology and language used by historical actors when referring to their discussions of gender/sex identity. Rafael de la Dehesa, *Queering the Public Sphere in Mexico and Brazil: Sexual Rights Movements in Emerging Democracies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), xv.

[15] See, for example, Roger Bartra, *Blood, Ink, and Culture: Miseries and Splendors of the Post-Mexican Condition* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); William H. Beezley, *Mexican National Identity: Memory, Innuendo, and Popular Culture* (Tucson: University

be used to reveal how historical memory is constructed and deployed, at times even subverting attempts at creating a "master narrative" of the postrevolutionary nation forged through the emotional, financial, and political investments of the government and its citizens.[16] In this process of postrevolutionary historical construction, the Dance of the Forty-One was a moment of selective and collective remembering by state-sponsored actors who worked to transform the event into a myth of a vanquished Porfirian past.[17] The contested nature of forging memory is also revealed in the process of teasing out ambivalent, even subversive relationships between subject positions and the hegemonic narratives constructed in the nationalist fervor of the 1930s and 1940s or the state-sponsored revisionism of the Porfiriato during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Throughout this entire period, the memory of the Forty-One resisted efforts at government appropriation and manipulation, remaining symbolic capital in the hands of sexual minorities to criticize government complacency in the era of tolerance policies and state apologies.

In this article, I analyze various artifacts, from memoirs to erotic magazines, to unpack what the Forty-One embodied for different historical actors and how evolving notions of sexuality were mapped onto their memory. In the process, I highlight both the aspects of the scandal that endured into later periods and those that were dropped or downplayed. In doing so, I will demonstrate that while early adaptations in novels and paintings were encapsulations of revolutionary homophobic criticism, the memory of the Forty-One served much more diverse agendas over the course of the twentieth century. First examining how the memory of the Forty-One became a contested site during the 1960s through the 1970s, I discuss how early novels about same-sex passion and the lesbian and the gay liberation movement initiated the process of reappropriating the symbol. The final section of the article explores how the story of the Forty-One was integrated into LGBTTTI culture and magazines in the 1980s and 1990s, demonstrating the ways in which they were part of the process of opening up new forms of representation, sexual desire, transgender visibility, and historical archiving in the aftermath of the HIV/AIDS crisis. I conclude with the centenary of the scandal to consider how the legacies of activism combined with scholarly inquiry to elevate the Forty-One into a tool of political criticism for activists and an object of historical research for scholars.

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of Arizona Press, 2008); Samuel Brunk, *The Posthumous Career of Emiliano Zapata: Myth, Memory, and Mexico's Twentieth Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008); and Claudio Lomnitz, *The Return of Comrade Ricardo Flores Magón* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2014).

[16] William H. Beezley, Cheryl English Martin, and William E. French, "Introduction: Constructing Consent, Inciting Conflict," in *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico*, ed. William H. Beezley, Cheryl English Martin, and William E. French (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1994), xxiv.

[17] Thomas Benjamin, *La Revolución: Mexico's Great Revolution as Memory, Myth, & History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 14–19.

Symbolic Reappropriation

Some of the earliest attempts at revising and contesting the legacy of the Forty-One came from writers who, by virtue of their ambivalent relationship to the revolutionary government, their sexuality, or their foreignness to Mexico, felt themselves to be outside of or excluded from the nationalist narratives that vilified a decadent and effeminate Porfirian past in favor of a virile revolutionary masculinity. In their memoirs and novels, Salvador Novo, Paolo Po, and Luis Buñuel turned to the memory of the Forty-One to make sense of this alterity and, as a result, revised the scandal into a transgressive memory that validated their sexuality and undermined the heterosexist nationalism of the revolution.

In spite of the insults launched at him by artists like el Corzo in the painting *Los paranoicos*, Salvador Novo, one of Mexico's most famous writers and intellectuals, continued producing works throughout the twentieth century that challenged Mexican social conventions. A talented writer recognized by contemporaries as a prodigy, Novo used his position as a government favorite to construct transgressive poems, plays, and essays that touched upon themes of same-sex passion without repercussion. Novo also used the memory of the Forty-One to counter the stigma and shame around his own sexual desires in his memoir, *La estatua de sal* (*Pillar of Salt*), which he began writing in 1945 but which was not published until after his death in 1974.

A product of recollection (and artistic embellishment), *Pillar of Salt* presents a fragmented picture of Novo's past. Novo emphasizes the role of his childhood memories in the formation of his sexual subjectivity. "Tardy and injurious attempts at psychoanalysis have salvaged from among them recollections of my most primitive stages of libidinal development," he writes, "others that were lodged with especial strength in my memory, and some my doctor helped me recognize as particularly significant."[18] Throughout the work, Novo highlights the numerous experiences that led to his sexual awakening: a piano teacher who touches him, his escapades with other boys in his school, and his first penetrative sexual encounter with a man at the age of thirteen (*PS*, 54–64, 74–79). Novo's "memory" of the Forty-One is another one of these formative moments and arrives at the peak of his sexual maturation toward the end of his memoir. Situated between his early encounters and the embrace of his same-sex desires, the memory plays a crucial role in Novo's recollection of how he came to his sexual-political subjectivity.

After recalling his discovery of other "survivors" of *porfirismo*, some of which are "unique" like him, he discusses meeting Antonio Adalid, or Toña (*PS*, 119–25). Adalid, an English professor at Novo's high school, came from an old wealthy family. He returned to the Federal District after

[18] Novo, *Pillar of Salt*, 47. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *PS*.

completing his studies in England during "the peak of opulent Porfirismo" and immediately became an active participant in the homosexual subculture of the capital. Novo then recounts a story regarding Adalid during the Porfiriato:

> It was a time when the exquisite aristocrats gave famous parties: although private, they doubtless gave rise to whispers and scandals of a prim little city: in short, it was the time of the famous Dance of the Forty-one. . . . There were procurers—the same Madre Meza?—who found boys for the diversion of the aristocrats. One party night, Toña was coming down the grand staircase in the sumptuous attire of a dancer. The whole gathering applauded his grand entrance; but at the foot of the staircase, the mute reproach of two eyes froze him in place. They seemed to be saying: "Ridiculous old man!" Toña turned and ascended the stairs, he abandoned his disguise, and descended to find the beautiful boy who had silently berated him. At that moment, there was an auction for the possession of that very youth. Antonio purchased him. He, too, was named Antonio. He was not yet twenty. Whether it was at the famous Dance of the Forty-one, or at another, a scandal broke out. Don José Adalid disinherited and disowned this degenerate son. (*PS*, 134–35)

Although Novo was not present at the ball, he recounts Adalid's story with conviction and detail—it was a constitutive element of his burgeoning homosexuality. For Novo, conjuring the Forty-One serves an entirely different purpose from the postrevolutionary strategy of vilifying them, as seen in artwork throughout this period by artists such as el Corzo, José Clemente Orozco, and others. Instead, his memoir is a public and politicized confession of same-sex lust in the face of the revolutionary culture of virile masculinity. The memory of the Forty-One plays a fundamental role in making sense of this carnal desire and constructing an alternative memory of both the Porfiriato and the revolution that went against the nationalist furor of the 1940s.[19]

Adalid's relationship to the scandal made him a comforting relic of *porfirismo*, and he represents a pillar of the Porfirian architecture that structures the memoir and explains why the Forty-One play such a formative role in Novo's memory. They are interlocutors between Novo's sexual experiences, his ambivalence toward the revolution, and his Porfirian upbringing. Born in 1904, Novo builds a romantic past reflective of his own position of growing pessimism regarding the revolution. Looking back upon his turn-of-the-century childhood, he characterizes the revolution as disruptive and fatal. His "memory of the furor" of Francisco Madero—the revolutionary leader and eventual president—and his army's 1911 entrance into Mexico

[19] Lear, *Picturing the Proletariat*, 109–10, 138.

City was "a nightmare midnight when I awoke in my parents' arms as the door rattled, and people threw themselves into the streets beseeching the heavens" (*PS*, 52). The violence of 1911 forced Novo's family to escape north to Chihuahua, tearing him away from his beloved capital city and extended family.

While living in the north, Novo and his family are defined by their defiant Porfirian style of dress, which went against the revolutionary ideals and aesthetic of the 1910s. He states that when he was dressed in the clothes of the Federal District, he felt stigmatized by northerners, for such style "had to have seemed not only an anachronism but a Porfirian challenge from this family 'from Mexico City' to the appearance that was more normal for kids from a north at once already a little Yankified and revolutionary, to put it simply" (*PS*, 58). Novo's Porfirian upbringing, which configures his attitude toward the revolution, explains why he chose a distinctly Porfirian scandal like the Forty-One to structure his sexual and political subjectivity.

Unlike Novo's intimate use of the Forty-One in his memoir, the memory of the Forty-One underwent profound public contestation after the post-revolutionary artistic feuds of the 1940s. Although it remained "vivid in the national imagination, provoking anxiety and at times superstitious paranoia," writers in the following decades also began to use the Forty-One for more public discussions of homosexuality.[20] By the 1960s, there was a growing willingness among members of the literary scene to challenge the stigma around the number. In 1964 *41 o el muchacho que soñaba en fantasmas* (41 or the boy who dreamed of phantoms) debuted on the literary scene.[21] Written under the pseudonym Paolo Po, it is considered a seminal text of homosexual literature in Mexico.[22] The novel follows *el muchacho*, the boy of the title, as he makes his way through the underground homosexual circuits of Mexico City, and it ends with his ill-fated romance with Fernando, the boy with the clear eyes. The Forty-One adorn the title but do not appear as characters. Rather, they serve as allusive specters looming over the narrative for readers. The novel, for example, is divided into forty-one chapters. The anonymity of *el muchacho* is likely an allusion to the nameless detainees of 1901, while the underground meet-ups described in the story capture the aura of the private party.[23]

A groundbreaking work, *41*'s portrayal of same-sex passion was meant to combat widespread intolerance. The novel stands out not for its radical departure from the narrative of suffering that was the norm in literary

[20] Irwin, *Mexican Masculinities*, 91.

[21] Paolo Po, *41 o el muchacho que soñaba en fantasmas* (Mexico City: B. Costa Amic, 1964).

[22] Irwin, *Mexican Masculinities*, 199.

[23] Juan Carlos Rocha Osornio, "El *performance* del insulto en los albores de la novela mexicana de temática homosexual: *41 o el muchacho que soñaba en fantasmas* (1964) de Paolo Po," *Cincinnati Romance Review* 34 (2012): 105–6.

discussions of homosexuality,[24] but rather because it deploys its characters' suffering by embracing the stigma and shame that haunted the infamous number to demonstrate how social repression caused psychological trauma.[25] The character of *el muchacho* endures this trauma and embraces a radical homosexual subjectivity, one that does not deny itself or hide under homophobic performance.[26] In using the number to highlight the struggles of gay men in Mexico, Po initiated the process of reappropriating the Forty-One, giving them a constitutive role in the *ambiente* (milieu) of Mexico City's homosexual subculture. He transformed the number into a symbol that gestured to perseverance in the face of ridicule.

Disputes over the meaning and significance of the number 41 are also found in the memoir of the Spanish filmmaker Luis Buñuel. In *Mi ultimo suspiro* (*My Last Sigh*), Buñuel recalls his exile in Mexico from 1946 to 1961, mentioning a particular newspaper story he read during that time:

> There is another story, which I remember vividly because I read it just after my arrival in Mexico. A man walks into number 39 on a certain street and asks for Señor Sánchez. The concierge replies that there is no Sánchez in his building, but that he might inquire at number 41. The man goes to number 41 and asks for Sánchez, but the concierge there replies that Sánchez lives at number 39, and that the first concierge must have been mistaken. The man returns to number 39 and tells that concierge what number 41 said, whereupon the concierge asks him to wait a moment, goes into another room, comes back with a revolver, and shoots the visitor.[27]

Published in 1982, Buñuel's memoir is an act of reconstruction much like that of Salvador Novo. Stating that he had little interest in Latin America beforehand, Buñuel emphasizes his feelings of alterity as a Spanish exile during his years in Mexico. More importantly, he stresses his fear and disgust toward what he perceives as the culture of violence in performances of Mexican masculinity—a form of self-fashioning that scholars such as Matthew Gutmann have described as being measured by one's ability to face death.[28] Rather than being a memory of visceral disgust toward Porfirian homosexuality, Buñuel's invocation of the concierge story is an expression of his revulsion toward postrevolutionary displays of virility.

Before revealing the story of the concierge, Buñuel describes his many close encounters with death while in Mexico. After accidentally gossiping

[24] Joseph Carrier, *De los Otros: Intimacy and Homosexuality among Mexican Gay Men* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 14.

[25] Rocha Osornio, "El *performance*," 109.

[26] Ibid., 107.

[27] Luis Buñuel, *My Last Sigh,* trans. Abigail Israel (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 207.

[28] Matthew C. Gutmann, *The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 228–31.

about a police officer, he suddenly fears a backlash: "I remembered certain ancient Mexican customs involving slander and vengeance," he writes. "Clearly, I'd committed an unpardonable sin, and I trembled when I imagined what the officer's response would be." Although he was especially interested in films about murder, Buñuel finds something disturbing about their popularity in Latin America and wondered if this reflected a lack of regard for human life in the region: "They reveal a dramatic aspect of Latin American culture . . . which seems to hold the belief that human life—one's own as well as other people's—is less important than it is elsewhere. One can be killed for the smallest mistake."

After divulging the newspaper story involving the number 41, he states that it was the journalist's tone that disturbed him more than the murder over a number: "The article was written as if the concierge's act was perfectly appropriate." Buñuel is criticizing not only the culture of death but *machismo* as a whole and its perversions of masculinity. "Machismo used to refer only to a strong sense of male vanity and dignity," he notes, "but in Mexico men seem more inordinately sensitive to slights of any kind."[29] If the Forty-One represented a dangerous Europeanized modernity for their contemporaries, for Buñuel they represented a lost alternative to the barbarity and virility that he was encountering. Using his position as a Spaniard to critique toxic Mexican masculinity, Buñuel represents the drama over the number as constitutive of a culture of violence stemming from the Mexican Revolution.

In these three works, we can see how the memory of the Forty-One could be deployed for agendas that were in opposition to postrevolutionary nationalism. These depictions broke away from the homophobia associated with the number and began the process of reappropriating the symbol, using it to criticize virile masculinity and to construct a homosexual subjectivity without shame. In the years to come, circles of activists would expand upon this radical deployment of the Forty-One's memory.

Archival Ephemera and Posada Prints

In 1978 one of the most recognized gay and lesbian rights groups in Mexico, the Frente Homosexual de Acción Revolucionaria (Homosexual Revolutionary Action Front, or FHAR) was founded. Led by the gay leftist activist Juan Jacobo Hernández, FHAR worked tirelessly for gay and lesbian equality until its dissolution in 1981. Curiously, in the digital archive of the organization, the Archivo Histórico del Movimiento Homosexual en México, there sits a solitary image—a copy of the 1901 broadsheet print of the Forty-One by José Guadalupe Posada. Its provenance is a mystery; it has no name attached to it, no date, and almost no text besides a simple description: "Print of Posada, on the Dance of the 41" (fig. 2). The archive

[29] Buñuel, *Sigh*, 204, 206, 207, 208.

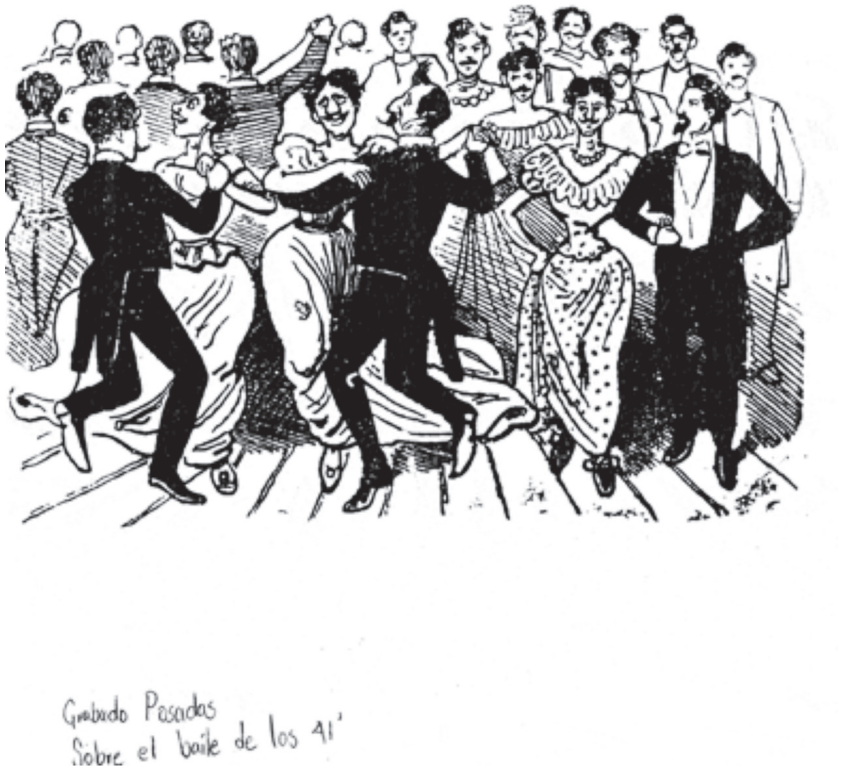

Figure 2. Undated Posada print, Archivo Histórico del Movimiento Homosexual en México "Ignacio Álvarez."

was maintained by Ignacio Álvarez, a founding member of FHAR, until his death in 1990. Whether it was originally among the documents from 1978 to 1981 or was placed there afterward either by Álvarez, his partner, Gustavo Montaño, or another archivist during processing is unclear. Nevertheless, since queer histories must often be assembled through fragmentary evidence and archival absences, the presence of the broadsheet can be used to interrogate the intimate relationship between archiving, sexual liberation, and historical memory.[30] While it has no dating itself, the image is archived in the Archivo Documental del Centro de Información y Documentación de las Homosexualidades en México (CIDHOM) in a collection for the

[30] For more on the relationship between archival practices and queer histories, see Daniel Marshall, Kevin P. Murphy, and Zeb Tortorici, eds., "Queering Archives: Historical Unravelings," special issue, *Radical History Review* 120 (2014); and Daniel Marshall, Kevin P. Murphy, and Zeb Tortorici, eds., "Queering Archives: Intimate Tracings," special issue, *Radical History Review* 122 (2015).

year 1978—the inaugural year of FHAR. Whether the image was somehow used during the group's foundation or was retroactively inserted into the collection afterward matters less than how it reveals that FHAR was tying its struggle to a longer history of homosexuality and was using the story of the Forty-One to do so.

The reason for the image's existence in FHAR's archive becomes clearer when considering the political goals of FHAR and how a minority group gains recognition from the state. Beginning in 1978, FHAR protested against the numerous arbitrary raids of bars and other spaces where gay men and women were known to gather. The organization also denounced police brutality and the targeted discrimination of gay men and women in arrests for prostitution, drug dealing, and other crimes, along with the sensationalist portrayal of homosexuality in the media.[31] When questioned why some gay men wore women's clothing, FHAR stated that it hoped to make drag a political weapon "to be used as a form of subversion."[32] The image and the memory it evokes speak to many of the grievances FHAR was voicing in the 1970s: police raids and excessive force, the need to live double lives, and the stigmatization of cross-dressing. The Posada image in the FHAR archive, therefore, is likely not just a case of casual appropriation. In this liberationist model of memory, the scandal was a historical event that could be identified with and integrated into a history of homosexuality in Mexico, a move that was fundamental to the pursuit of equality.

One of the main goals of FHAR was to gain recognition as a minority group of citizens whose fundamental rights and protections were being violated. In their "Declaration of Principles," the founders of FHAR stated that they were "homosexual and lesbian Mexicans, conscious of our condition as an oppressed social group," and they demanded that "the Constitution of the United States of Mexico bestow upon us the right of free gathering, association, information and expression" extended to all Mexican citizens.[33] One of the most important tools necessary for this battle of rights was establishing a history as a marginalized minority, which FHAR was actively attempting to do in the 1970s and 1980s.

A reproduction of the Posada print was also featured in an op-ed by the essayist and playwright Héctor Anaya titled "Nuestras costumbres" (Our customs) and printed in a 1978 issue of the magazine *Ovaciones*, which focused on the story of the Forty-One. He revisited old taboos around the

[31] Carlos Gonzalez Correa, "'Vamos a salir del closet' clama el tercer sexo: Se unieron dos agrupaciones de homosexuales para luchar contra la represión policiaca y los machistas," 10 June 1979, Archivo Documental del Centro de Información y Documentación de las Homosexualidades en México, Mexico City (cited hereafter as CIDHOM); "Los homosexuales califican las 'razzias' como arbitrarias," *Ovaciones*, 8 October 1979; "Lucha el FHAR contra la represión policiaca," *Diario de México*, 15 December 1980, 3.

[32] Leticia Singer, "Homosexuales del FHAR: Militantes que no se disfrazan," *Interviu*, 23–29 August 1978, 24–25.

[33] FHAR, "Declaración de principios," 1979, CIDHOM.

number, such as the claim that no man in Mexico celebrated a forty-first birthday, and argued that the number was so scandalous that "even women are cautious of it."[34] Anaya discusses the history of the scandal, taking care to note the class privilege that enabled some to escape punishment while others suffered in the Yucatán. He ends the piece on a critical note. Some, he remarks, still yearned for the days when homosexuals were openly persecuted and were threatening to emigrate from the country due to the growing culture of tolerance that supposedly meant homosexuality would soon be obligatory. Following the example of activists, Anaya deflected the stigma away from the Forty-One and instead mocked those who rejected tolerance. Unlike previous uses of allusions to the Forty-One as a means of criticism and homosexual subjectivity, Anaya deployed the event to support the homosexual liberation movement, constructing a historical genealogy that frames the Forty-One as the progenitors of a fight against repression.

By the end of the 1970s, FHAR members had painted the Forty-One as representative of all homosexuals, and sympathetic reporters were beginning to follow their example. But because the memory of this historical event was so dynamic, it could not remain under the sole command of a political movement like homosexual liberation. Scandalous bars and clubs also took on the name, using the memory as a site of erotic allure instead of politics and initiating community dialogue around the role of pleasure in the process of liberation.

In 1978 the newspaper *El Universal* ran a seven-part sensationalist column by José Luis Parra meant to reveal the underground homosexual culture of Mexico City. The columns focused on everything from prostitution to the unique slang within the community and the locations of various clubs around the city. His fourth column from 24 October 1978 even included a photo that attests to the existence of a private gay bar in Mexico City with the name Le Fameux 41 (The Famous 41) in the Zona Rosa—the nightlife and gay neighborhood of the city center (fig. 3). Parra left discussion of the scandal, however, until his seventh and final column. Stating that a tour of Mexico City's underground club culture would be "unpleasant yet interesting," Parra opens with a synopsis of the scandal: "In the time of Porfirio Díaz there existed many homosexuals in high society . . . and they enjoyed themselves at parties that were notorious." He writes

[34] Héctor Anaya, "Nuestras costumbres: 41," *Ovaciones*, 1978. The claim that no man celebrated a forty-first birthday likely came from the 1965 book by Francisco L. Urquizo, *Símbolos y números*, in which he stated, "Saying 41 to a man is to call him effeminate. To be under what shelters that number is to be in certain ways effeminate. The influence of that tradition is so great that everything official passes over the number 41. There is no army division, regiment, or battalion that carries the number 41. They arrive at the number 40 and from there jump to number 42. There is no list with a 41st line. There are no cities that label a house number 41, and if there is no other choice, they use 40B. There is no hotel or hospital room that bears the number 41. No one has a 41st birthday; from 40 they jump to 42." Francisco L. Urquizo, *Símbolos y números* (Mexico City: B. Costa Amic, 1965), 67.

Figure 3. "Le Fameux 41," *El Universal*, 24 October 1978.

that from the moment of the raid onward, "it was customary to take out the criminals and exhibit them in front of the people."[35]

The memory of the scandal enabled Parra to satiate his curiosity and explore the homosexual *ambiente* of Mexico City, but his report also unintentionally reveals how men and women were able to make the symbol of the Forty-One a constitutive piece of homosexual subculture. By naming a private space after the scandal, they appropriated the original ball's aura of secrecy and looming threat of a raid. While Le Fameux 41 of the Zona Rosa closed in the 1980s, other spaces continued to play on the number, such as the 14, located in the Plaza Garibaldi of the historic downtown.[36] Another, named the Famoso 42 (Famous 42), was also in the city center at Calle República de Cuba No. 42 and remained open until at least the mid-1990s.[37] Bars and clubs were divisive topics of conversation within sexual rights circles and thrust the memory of the Forty-One into a debate around their legacy as progenitors of political struggle or the pursuit of pleasure. Many bars and clubs, instead of serving as spaces for consciousness-raising, were spaces where exclusive clientele met for drinking and drugs. Groups like FHAR protested that bars like Le Fameux 41 were exploitative discriminatory spaces—the two-hundred-peso cover charge (roughly US$8.00 at the time or US$24.00 today) to enter 41, for example, got one three

[35] José Luis Parra, "Clubes privados para la gente gay," *El Universal*, 27 October 1978, 1, 13.

[36] Irwin, "The Scandalous Birth," 375.

[37] *Boys and Toys,* no. 25 (February 1995).

Figure 4. Colectivo Sol 1990 planner. Courtesy of the Centro Académico de la Memoria de Nuestra América, Autonomous University of Mexico City.

drink tickets but priced out anyone from the lower classes.[38] During the 1990s, concerns were also raised about the overtly sexualized atmosphere in places like Bar 14 in Plaza Garibaldi, which had been infamous for its lewdness. By 1999 Bar 14 was "a club whose features have softened to show a less sexually explicit [*cachondo*] scene. . . . Yet it still maintains an air of mystery. Faces that are hidden behind layers of makeup; undefined breasts that hang from a not very feminine chest, short skirts that barely cover legs."[39] The police regularly carried out raids on such bars, making arrests for drug possession and prostitution. Bar 14 came under fire by activists because its owners and patrons did not attempt to make the space more openly political in the style of "decent" places such as El Desván de las Virreynas (The attic of the queens), a lesbian bar that doubled as a meeting space for conferences, debates, and performances. Yet Bar 14 served a vital role as a transgressive space for those whose bodies and identities did not adhere to a gender binary and for others who sought more explicit forms of recreation like their turn-of-the-century counterparts.

Overall, the memory of the Forty-One came to be used by reporters, artists, activists, and even club owners in diverse ways throughout the history of Mexico's gay and lesbian movement. Juan Jacobo Hernández, the former FHAR leader turned AIDS activist, recognized the affective power

[38] *La Onda*, 26 October 1980, 16–17.
[39] "Un rol por los antros," *La Jornada*, 10 September 1999.

of the memory and would continue to use it in the years to come. For example, Colectivo Sol (Sun Collective), a group cofounded with former members of FHAR upon its dissolution in 1981, published a day planner for the year 1990 that resumed the process of constructing a historical timeline of Mexican gay history.[40] Dedicating each week to major Mexican personalities and events in the history of sexual diversity, the planner was an adaptation of the traditional family album that gave its user a sense of queer kinship with fellow community members, past and present.[41] In addition to commemorating icons like Salvador Novo and Frida Kahlo, the calendar memorialized activists who had passed away, many due to complications from HIV/AIDS. A dedication to the Dance of the Forty-One appears alongside a reprint of the Posada etching in the pages for the week of 4–9 June (fig. 4). The scandal is described on the Saturday portion of the week—the day when readers would be most likely to frequent nightclubs and bars. This unique artifact constructs affective ties between its user and a minority history, allowing for an intermixing of personal information and historical events. An introductory note in the planner reminds its users that the scandal emerged as a result of *nota roja* (sensationalist journalism dedicated to crime) and links the historical scandal to contemporary discriminatory arrests and tabloid journalism: "Since its inception this genre has been a rich source for the reinforcement of prejudice, shame, oppression, and moral lynching of homosexuals who have the unfortunate luck of being caught in the grips of this type of press."[42]

Relying on the memory of the Forty-One to conjure a history of violence became a useful tool for the burgeoning gay and lesbian movement in Mexico as it sought to establish a genealogy of oppression that could serve its political cause. We can also see, however, that the symbol could exceed the initial aims of homosexual liberation and become an umbrella for radical forms of expression, whether through drag performances at FHAR meetings or lewd dancing at Bar 14. Particularly with the onset of the HIV/AIDS crisis, archiving and disseminating knowledge would become a crucial practice for the preservation of both life and history. CIDHOM was ground zero for this process, and the Forty-One became a symbol of the movement for survival. But as discussions over gender identity and sexual desire became more complex in the 1990s and 2000s, the symbolism of the Forty-One became even more diverse in sites of eroticism, communal interconnection, and diverse representation.

[40] CIDHOM Agenda cultural 1990 México Gay, 1990, Fondo I, Caja 5, Exp. EIS18, Centro Académico de la Memoria de Nuestra América (cited hereafter as CAMeNA), Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México.

[41] Elspeth H. Brown and Sara Davidmann, "'Queering the Trans* Family Album': Elspeth H. Brown and Sara Davidmann, in Conversation," *Radical History Review* 122 (2015): 188–200.

[42] CIDHOM Agenda cultural 1990 México Gay, 1990, Fondo I, Caja 5, Exp. EIS18, CAMeNA.

Engendering Representation

Activists made increasingly conscious use of historical symbolism in the wake of the HIV/AIDS crisis, particularly in the 1990s, which was a period of reconstruction in the aftermath of the first phases of the epidemic.[43] Gay magazines, for example, became a vital way of disseminating knowledge about HIV prevention—a crucial move in Mexico and elsewhere where the Catholic Church actively sought to crush safe-sex media campaigns, resulting in the absence of public discussion of condom use.[44] Magazines aimed at sexual minorities also became the means of preserving the community history and knowledge that activists had worked to construct, especially as many of those who had lived in the homosexual communities of the 1970s fell victim to health complications. We can use erotic and gay interest magazines to trace changing conversations in the LGBTTTI movement as sexual rights activists and journalists used the memory of the Forty-One to discuss new subjects, from the right of sexual minorities to have a space in the historical narrative to the growing importance of transgender rights. The memory of the Forty-One in this later period, deployed in these magazines, served as an umbrella under which the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and increasingly active transgender community could come together.

Juan Jacobo Hernández reprised his use of Forty-One's memory in the magazine he directed and produced, *41 soñar fantasmas*. Published in 1992 under the direction of Hernández, Colectivo Sol, and CIDHOM, *41 soñar fantasmas* and its partner publication, *Del otro lado,* were meant to inaugurate a new age of gay and lesbian media, and *41 soñar fantasmas* was explicitly dedicated to "recovering our history."[45] In addition to columns about the possibilities for readers to find love and happiness, the magazine provided information on HIV/AIDS and advertisements emphasizing the use of condoms. Once again, the 1901 Posada print makes an appearance, this time on the cover of the inaugural issue of *41 soñar fantasmas* (fig. 5).

Playing on the title of the Paolo Po novel, the magazine deployed the memory of the scandal to reintroduce readers to the timeline of gay and lesbian struggle: "We were assigned this number as children and adolescents while in school. Assigning us this number made us faggots [*maricones*] as the engraver Posada once did. . . . Recuperating it, along with the pejoratives that they give us, is part of the attempt to recover our history, which is full of events, moments, and characters, including the '41 maricones,

[43] Rodrigo Laguarda, *Ser gay en la ciudad de México: Lucha de representaciones y apropriación de una identidad, 1968–1982* (Mexico City: CIESAS, 2009), 141.

[44] Matthew Gutmann, *Fixing Men: Sex, Birth Control, and AIDS in Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 38; Héctor Carrilo, *The Night Is Young: Sexuality in Mexico in the Time of AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 218–19.

[45] "Recuperar nuestra historia," *41 soñar fantasmas,* no. 0 (June 1992): 1.

Figure 5. Cover of *41 soñar fantasmas.*

muy chulos y coquetones' [41 faggots, so pretty and flirtatious]."[46] With these words, *41 soñar fantasmas* revived the Forty-One for its readers to "dream of the possible freedom" that would emerge from struggle.[47] The repression of the Forty-One is positioned as the beginning of a history in which sexual minorities could assert their agency in the midst of social repression and stigmatization either by going to a dance or by demanding medical treatments.

Like their FHAR predecessors, the writing and editorial staff of *41 soñar fantasmas* did not shy away from discussions of gender transgression. The magazine reflected the shifts in lexicon among those who identified as *travesti* or its working-class equivalent, *vestida*, literally translated as

[46] Ibid. This was the title of the famous Posada print that we see repeatedly throughout the century.

[47] Ibid.

"dressed," which many readers who wrote to the magazine found confusing. The *travesti/vestida* community, although marginal at the beginning of the sexual liberation movements of the 1970s and 1980s, had grown more vocal and political by the 1990s. During this time, *travesti* as a political identity began to be differentiated from homosexual. Before the widespread use of the word "transgender," *travesti* and *vestida* were the preferred terms to refer to a gender-variant identity, and they remain so in many lower-class communities. While many *travestis* also identify as homosexual in their sexual object choice, their identity is also derived from the transformation of their bodies through either dress or surgical/hormonal modification to create a feminine appearance. For *travestis*, their identity means going beyond dressing in clothes assigned to the opposite gender/sex for temporary periods and instead signals refuting a gender binary. Although assigned a masculine gender at birth, *travestis* are defined by their choice to identify themselves as feminine with female names and pronouns, to fight for recognition and rights under this term as a form of political identity, and to present themselves as such with or without surgical or hormonal modifications to their bodies.[48]

In *41 soñar fantasmas*, the term *travesti* was used when referring to individuals who primarily presented themselves as women and dressed in women's attire and/or maintained a dual form of identity with given and adopted male-female names printed alongside one another (e.g., Antonio García Santos "Cristi"). The growing visibility and differentiation of this identity, however, resulted in polarized reactions, as many members of the community could not seem to differentiate a drag persona from someone who identified as *travesti*. "I am a man and I like men," wrote one anonymous reader in regard to the coverage of transgender issues, "and I profoundly admire men who dress as women and even more, those who change their sex. You have to have a lot of balls [*güevos*] to do that, and if it makes them happier, then that's great." Another reader presented a different opinion: "It seems to me that if someone is homosexual, they have no reason to go around dressing as a woman, because what is sought after is a man and not a caricature of a woman."[49] As its readers debated the difference between a homosexual man, someone who cross-dressed, and a *travesti*, the magazine itself remained an advocate for *travestis/vestidas*, giving them a platform to voice their experiences in sex work and their stories of harassment.

Overall, *41 soñar fantasmas* aimed to validate same-sex desire and passion in the face of the HIV/AIDS epidemic through the use of safe sex

[48] De la Dehesa, *Queering*, 19–20; Susana Vargas Cervantes, "Alarma! Mujercitos Performing Gender in a Pigmentocratic Sociocultural System" (PhD diss., McGill University, 2013), 48–49, 160–61; Annick Prieur, *Mema's House, Mexico City: On Transvestites, Queens, and Machos* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 144–45, 152–55; Susan Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution* (New York: Seal Press, 2017), 39–40.

[49] "Balcon y closet," *41 soñar fantasmas,* no. 1 (1992): 7.

education. Under the moniker of the Forty-One, it also broached a debate raging among the gay community in the 1990s: Who was a homosexual, who was cross-dressing, and who was a *travesti*? While the Forty-One were considered *maricones* by the writers of the magazine, it is likely that the scandal nevertheless raised questions as to the identity of those who participated in the ball. And although these terms were still under debate in the 1990s, writers of the magazine chose to highlight the struggles of the *travesti* community as a distinct social group, connecting their oppression with that of the mainstream lesbian and gay community, just as their predecessors in FHAR had done years earlier.[50]

Later gay magazines and erotica would follow this tradition of revisiting the symbol of the Forty-One to discuss sexual rights. Yet the concerns and demands of writers also began to broaden beyond the defense of homosexual desire and the pursuit of pleasure in the aftermath the HIV/AIDS crisis. Jesús Meza of the magazine *Boys and Toys*, for example, deployed the memory in defense of homosexuality while also highlighting concerns of historical preservation and the exclusion of LGBTTI history from the national narrative. In 1998 he broached the subject of the Forty-One in an article titled "Un viejo intento: La historia de los 41." Throughout the article, Meza highlights his frustrations with attempting to reconstruct the history of the Forty-One, noting that he had been unable to locate more information about the dance and suggesting that the national archive was unwilling to accommodate the history of homosexuality. Unable to tell a complete story due to the lack of primary sources, he and the editors decided to commemorate the Forty-One and highlight their suffering. "On the occasion of the 41st issue of our magazine," they write, "we thought it opportune to dedicate this edition to commemorating an experience which, despite the many years that have passed, continues to be the marker of gay life, repressed by a homophobia that has won another century to its cause." The article places special emphasis on the deportation of the Forty-One to the Yucatán, nicknaming it the "Siberia of Mexico," to call attention to the history of state repression and murder of individuals "whose only sin was having organized a *travesti* party on private property."[51] In this issue, *Boys and Toys* reflected a shift in the use of the memory of the Forty-One. Rather than solely serving as a case of repression to be used to demand tolerance, as in the tradition of FHAR, they were an example of the long history of sexual minorities in the national history of Mexico who were now demanding a place in it.

[50] The *travesti/vestida* community, historically, had been linked to the broader sexual rights movement in Mexico. Some of the earliest *travesti/vestida* activism emerged in the early 1980s from members of FHAR, but a large-scale trans rights movement did not emerge in Mexico until after 1996 with the founding of EON, Transgender Intelligence. De la Dehesa, *Queering*, 19.

[51] Jesús Meza, "Un viejo intento: La historia de los 41," *Boys and Toys* 41 (1998): 35.

As discussions of identity became more diverse in Mexico in the late twentieth century, the memory of the Forty-One would be employed for more radical forms of representation. *Apolo*, another publication of the 1990s, was more varied than *Boys and Toys* in its use of the Forty-One's memory. While it also discussed safe sex and HIV/AIDS, local and international celebrity gossip, and drug and alcohol use, its authors were less interested in political discussions than in exploring the *ambiente* of Mexico City and the spectrum of human sexuality within it. Across dozens of issues from 1992 to 1994, *Apolo* writers reported on topics such as the environmental and biological contributors to sexual orientation, the diversity of chromosome conditions, and the prevalence of intersex births, and they engaged in discussions of issues such as transsexuality and what at the time were called "sex-change operations."[52] The editors were also more attentive to the diversity of their potential audience, addressing readers as "amigo, amiga, o lo que seas," using the masculine and feminine of "friend" along with the caveat "or however you identify yourself."[53]

It is not surprising, considering the diverse interests of *Apolo* writers, that the magazine's use of the memory of the Forty-One pushed boundaries. Stating it would give the "true history of the 41," *Apolo*'s version of events exceeds the imagination of even Eduardo Castrejón, the author of the 1906 novel on the Forty-One, complete with comedic side commentary and a photo of a staged performance of an escape from the dance (fig. 6). Constructing another fictional retelling of the scandal, the anonymous author sets the dance in the 1930s and tells the story of how a group of foul-minded (*mal pensados*) police officers are sent to the house of a rich industrialist whose party was offending decency and morality. Guests included Mexico's most important dignitaries and politicians, who brought designer dresses to change into. As the police raid the home, "terrified queens run through rooms and gardens breaking their high heels on the rose bushes and chrysanthemums." One guest, remembering he was an important public figure, demanded that the police stop the raid, but "the only thing he had forgotten was to take off his blonde wig á la Greta Garbo in *The Lady of the Camellias*." The account ends with the observation that the raid of the dance was yet another case of intercommunity bickering, as "one queen [*loca*] [was] upset that she was not invited" and likely called the police. The author then calls upon readers to overcome such petty divides and rivalries, "as we should be defending instead of destroying one another."[54]

[52] Now more correctly known as sex-reassignment, gender-reassignment, or gender-confirmation surgery.

[53] Narciso Hernández, "Editorial . . . el comentario de nuestro editor," *Apolo,* no. 2 (September 1992): 3.

[54] "Oye, ¿eres de ambiente? Conoce la verdadera historia de los '41,'" *Apolo,* no. 12 (September 1993): 16–17.

Figure 6. "Illustrative Photo of a Possible Escape," *Apolo* 1, no. 12 (September 1993).

For the *Apolo* author, the historical memory of the Forty-One was less about the facts of the case and more about how it could be used to send a message to readers. Instead of revisiting a long history of oppression, they broadened the use of the memory, fabricating a new narrative that was more attentive to contemporary concerns within the LGBTTTI community—communal fighting. They took the memory of the raid as an opportunity to critique not only the social discrimination against members of sexual minorities but also how quarrelling within the community weakened solidarity.

In the early 2000s this conversation about representation and the defense of a diverse community found an even stronger voice in the magazine *La 41 Gay*. Advertising itself as "también para mujeres" (also for women), *La 41 Gay* contained numerous images of nude transgender bodies right alongside those of cisgender men and women (fig. 7). Readers could thus not avoid glancing at both simultaneously, fulfilling what Susan Stryker calls the "axis of difference" in the transgender phenomenon that disrupts the normative investment in privileging same-sex sexual object choice as the primary site of resisting heterosexist norms. Rather than emphasizing cisgender men and women as the main objects of desire for readers to explore their sexuality, *La 41 Gay* offered a diverse representation of body

to o haber nacido con el sexo erróneo.

El deseo de algunos hombres de aparecer como mujeres y ser aceptados como tales ha existido siempre, desde los emperadores romanos hasta algunas tribus actuales de Norteamérica y Madagascar.

Es un hecho comprobado que muchas personas no se encuentren a gusto con su identidad sexual y desean cambiar de sexo.

La primera diferencia que se debería establecer antes de entrar en materia, es la que existe entre el transexual y otro tipo de manifestaciones, como sería el travestismo y la homosexualidad, pasiva o activa.

El transexual tiene el sentimiento interno de pertenecer al sexo opuesto o haber nacido con el sexo erróneo.

Vive su propio cuerpo con un sentimiento de extrañeza, como si no debiera ser el suyo, y aquello que lo define sexualmente lo siente como repulsivo en el interior de su cuerpo.

Siente un deseo irreprimible de ser como el otro sexo en cuanto al vestido y a la apariencia externa durante toda su vida, y no como muchos travestis, sólo algunas horas del día. Ese deseo existe también en cuanto al reconocimiento legal que implica la necesidad de cambiar oficialmente de nombre y sexo.

Existen algunas características que definen al transexual, entre ellas están:

Una clara sensación de malestar y de estar inadecuado con respecto al sexo anatómico que le todo al nacer.

El ferviente deseo de liberarse de sus genitales y de vivir como un miembro del otro sexo de una manera normal y aceptable, al menos para él mismo.

El ser o sentirse transexual no se debe a una enfermedad de tipo mental.

ción de ser respetuosos con las otras personas.

El verdadero transexual tiene el sentimiento interno de pertenecer al sexo opues-

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Figure 7. Intermixed nude photos, *La 41 Gay*, no. 6.

types.[55] The articles in *La 41 Gay* also differentiated between transsexuality, *travesti*, and homosexuality and highlighted issues like the erasure of bisexuality and the performativity of gender, demonstrating how critical discussions of feminist theory and sexuality studies were being adapted and utilized on the ground to confront issues within the LGBTTTI community of Mexico.[56]

From what can be gathered from the few archived copies of *La 41 Gay*, there was never an article on the Forty-One. Rather, the importance of the magazine is the choice of the number to serve as the title for a publication that would emphasize diverse readership and themes. The call for readers to submit stories, for example, states: "The pages of *La 41* are open to readers, and we invite you send stories of your sexual, familial, and social experiences, etc. as well as your obsessions and hidden desires that are latent and ready to be stimulated, that dominate your sexuality and are part of your personality. . . . Write to us and make *La 41* an effective medium for connecting you to others who think, sympathize, feel, and dream like you. *La 41 Gay* is not an erotic publication, but it is a medium to express sexuality freely." *La 41 Gay*'s editors sought to connect readers to one another and

[55] Susan Stryker, "(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies," in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen Wittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 7.

[56] Writers for the magazine cited Margaret Leroy on women's sexual pleasure and June M. Reinisch on childhood sexual development, and they noted how intellectuals in universities were producing research on sexual minorities. Furthermore, their emphasis on gender as performative suggests an engagement with Judith Butler.

their fantasies, creating a community around the symbol of the Forty-One. Authors of *La 41 Gay* also took up conversations on sexual practices and forms of pleasure that their contemporaries tended to overlook—women performing anal sex on their husbands or heterosexual-identifying men using dildos, for example. In addition, it supported its audience, responding to one reader's concerns about not enjoying anal sex by noting that not all homosexual men engaged in the act.

The memory of the Forty-One by the 2000s meant a fight for a more diverse community and acceptance of it. *La 41 Gay* writers challenged readers and questioned commitments to diverse representation in the community, asking, for example, why there were not more images of leather culture or different body types in gay advertisements.[57] Furthermore, many of the photos in *La 41 Gay* were of individuals whose darker skin tones, along with their marginalized gender/sex identities, marked them as occupying the lower end of Mexico's stratified class and racial standards of beauty. Nevertheless, their representation was used to transgress the pigmentocratic sociocultural system of Mexico, which ascribes preferential treatment, economic affluence, and political power to those with lighter skin tones.[58] The models' poses and facial expressions suggest as much, and their provocative performance gives them authority over their own image, challenging pigmentocratic skin color preferences and suggesting, as Susana Vargas Cervantes has referred to regarding similar images in the Mexican magazine *¡Alarma!*, "a process of subjectivation and subject identification informed as much by class/skin tonalities as by gender/sex."[59] Through such iterative acts, they constructed and disrupted the binary system of gender in the feminine and masculine—binaries, as Judith Butler has noted, that conflate the feminine with biological sex for the goals of heterosexual reproduction and that require regulation to ensure their differentiation in the practice of compulsory heterosexual desire.[60]

In the images of *La 41 Gay*, we can see how the transgender subject denaturalizes and exposes the limits of heterosexual regimes of desire.[61] While it has been argued that the hegemony of the heterosexual regime can, nevertheless, be further empowered by virtue of its denaturalization because *travestis* do not necessarily undermine or invert configurations of gender and sexuality but instead perfectly embody them,[62] I argue that this

[57] *La 41 Gay,* no. 6: 5, 31. The magazine, interestingly, did not include publication dates. However, from the contemporary events it covered, one can place these issues in the early 2000s.

[58] Vargas Cervantes, "Alarma!," 6; Prieur, *Mema's House*, 150–51.

[59] Vargas Cervantes, "Alarma!," 6.

[60] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 54.

[61] Judith Butler, "Critically Queer," *GLQ* 1 (1993): 22.

[62] Don Kulick, *Travesti: Sex, Gender, and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 9.

is not the case in *La 41 Gay*. As Butler notes, the enactment of a prohibition has the capability to create an alternative hierarchy of sexual desire.[63] In this case, the eroticization of the transgendered body using the memory of the Forty-One was such an enactment because the magazine extended what was initially a signifier of male homosexuality—the number 41—to a signifier of transgender eroticism, creating an alternative regime of desire that did not center cisgender bodies as the main sexual object choice for readers. This also explains why the magazine *La 41 Gay* deployed the term "gay" in its title and articles in an attempt to appeal to an audience across a spectrum of gender/sexual identities. As David Valentine notes, forms of expression of transgender erotic desire are often overlooked in the logic of binary gender, especially among lower-class and working-class groups that often deploy the category of "gay" as an umbrella term for sexual desire.[64] In Mexico, *travestis* and *vestidas* during the 1980s and 1990s often deployed the terms *joto/jota* (fairy) or *homosexual* interchangeably to make sense of their sexual preferences.[65] Among transgender and *travesti* communities, the term *homosexual* or *joto* did not always connote gender normativity, nor was it exclusively applied to cisgender homosexual men (although, at times, the term "homosexual" could be used to differentiate someone from the middle class). Rather, it more often served as a marker of difference from heterosexuality.[66] The creators of *La 41 Gay*, in turn, mirrored this liberal application of terminology and used the more internationalist term "gay" to signify a broad identity, extending the symbol of the Forty-One to encompass transgender models and readers and transforming the Forty-One from a shorthand for homosexual men to a symbol of sexual and gender diversity.

Overall, *La 41 Gay* covered an array of desires and pleasures, portraying individuals who defied classed, raced, and gendered standards of beauty. In this way, the magazine broadened the definition of who was considered sexually appealing. Among the seemingly endless supply of erotica, adult magazines, and pornography circulating in Mexico throughout the twentieth century, there were certainly others that intermixed transgender and cisgender nudes. But few did so under the moniker of the Forty-One, calling upon the memory of a gender-transgressive ball to bring attention to the desirability of transgender bodies alongside those of cisgender men and women. And fewer still were likely to consider the cis and trans female

[63] Butler, "Critically Queer," 22.

[64] David Valentine, "'I Went to Bed with My Own Kind Once': The Erasure of Desire in the Name of Identity," in Stryker and Wittle, *The Transgender Studies Reader*, 415–16.

[65] Prieur, *Mema's House*, xiii, 25–29. The term *joto* supposedly derives from the cell block J, which was used to house homosexuals in the Lecumberri Federal Penitentiary of Mexico City, although the use of the word as a derogatory term for homosexuals possibly predates the establishment of the jail. For more information, see Sergio García Ramírez, *El final de Lecumberri: Reflexiones sobre la prisión* (Mexico City: Porrúa, 1977).

[66] Valentine, "I Went to Bed," 416.

gaze as an important focus, always reminding readers that its pages were for "her as well."

From *41 soñar fantasmas* to *La 41 Gay*, the memory of the Forty-One played a crucial role in the public sphere of the LGBTTTI community. In their name, activists continued constructing a minority history in the aftermath of the demographic crisis of HIV/AIDS. Magazines like *41 soñar fantasmas*, with its images of healthy male bodies, did much to counteract the negative media portrayals of AIDS victims in the early years of the epidemic that sought to pathologize homosexual men.[67] Furthermore, magazines and erotica used the Forty-One to reverse the moral lynching of *nota roja*, enabling self-fashioning and transgender representation. Finally, these later uses of memory remind us that while the Forty-One were considered homosexuals by the press, gender transgression was a central part of the story. "Although it is impossible to know now either how those 'maricones' self-identified or their sexual practices," to use Vargas Cervantes's words, one can at least entertain the possibility of a prototypical transgender subjectivity during the ball.[68]

A Century of Scandal

The 2001 centenary of the scandal brought renewed attention to the Forty-One. In Mexico the actor Tito Vasconcelos presented a performance-art piece inspired by the Forty-One.[69] Local government in Mexico City even invested in integrating the scandal into national history by funding an exhibition at the Museum of the City of Mexico titled *Muy chulos y coquetones. La redada de los 41. A cien años de un agravio* (Very pretty and flirtatious. The raid of the 41. One hundred years of offense). Various Posada prints depicting the scandal were displayed along with works by contemporary artists. On the night of the raid's anniversary, the museum also held a party that was billed not as a historically themed dance "but rather a dance that makes history."[70] Meanwhile, the newspaper *La jornada* published an article by Miguel Hernández Cabrera that traced the legacy of the Forty-One from their depiction in the homophobic penny press of 1901 to their appropriation as a symbol of *orgullo* (pride) by 2001. The piece also made sure to highlight the continued violence and injustice faced by the LGBTTTI community and the impunity enjoyed by their perpetrators. Drawing a connection between contemporary sexual rights advocates and

[67] Roger Hallas, *Reframing Bodies: AIDS, Bearing Witness, and the Queer Moving Image* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 6; Rodger Streitmatter, *From "Perverts" to "Fab Five": The Media's Changing Depiction of Gay Men and Lesbians* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 50–51.

[68] Vargas Cervantes, "Alarma!," 161.

[69] Patricia Vega, "Cien años de los '41,'" *La Jornada*, 5 November 2001, 5a.

[70] Ángel Vargas, "Jacinto de Jesús muestra cómo la comunidad gay crea mecanismos de resistencia y solidaridad," *La Jornada,* 17 November 2001, 3a.

their Porfirian predecessors, Hernández Cabrera argues that "todos/as somos 41" (we are all 41).

> There no longer exist young "broken" homosexuals who die of malaria, diarrhea, and neglect, exiled by Porfirian officials to work camps in the Yucatán, . . . but there do exist young gay men who are brutally assassinated in the city of Colima due to the negligence of authorities. . . . There no longer exists a patriarchal Porfirio Díaz who forcefully reprimands his homosexual son-in-law for his "filthy acts," but there does exist a president of the National Union for Parents of Families who, during his acceptance speech, expressed his opposition to the recent Gay Pride Parade and proposed to fight "to reestablish morality and to prevent these types of demonstrations from happening."[71]

After a century of violence, tolerance measures by the government were criticized by writers like Hernández Cabrera for providing little relief. In the era of President Vincente Fox and the conservative National Action Party (PAN), the Forty-One's memory vindicated the expression of sexual diversity and the pursuit of pleasure. Although affective ties to the Forty-One made them part of an ancestral lineage, they were also specters of persecution and death that haunted the community. At the XXIII Marcha del Orgullo por el Respeto al Derecho a la Diversidad Sexual (Pride March for the Respect of Sexual Diversity), a group named the 41 danced to the music of Paulina Rubio and dedicated the performance to their "sisters in martyrdom" (*manas mártires*).[72] The symbol of the Forty-One still proved useful to illustrate the disregard for life and impunity for homophobic acts prevalent across the country and at every level of state power.

In the United States a conference was held in 2001 at Tulane University titled "The Centenary of the 41: Sexuality and Social Control in Latin America," which resulted in the 2003 edited volume, *The Famous 41: Sexuality and Social Control in Mexico, c. 1901* by Robert McKee Irwin, Edward J. McCaughan, and Michelle Rocío Nasser. The contributions to this volume reinvigorated discussion of the scandal while making crucial primary sources easily available. The 2010 republication of *Los cuarenta y uno: Novela crítico-social* by the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) was one result of this renewed interest. This spirit of recovery continues, leading scholar-activists to rediscover the 1906 novel by Eduardo A. Castrejón in the National Library of Mexico and inspiring Juan Carlos Harris, a lawyer in Mexico City, to search the archives of Mexico's Supreme Court for the names of seven individuals arrested in the raid whose identities

[71] Miguel Hernández Cabrera, "Los cuarenta y uno, cien años después," *La Jornada Semanal*, 9 December 2001.

[72] Ibid.

had not previously been known. "These people were protomartyrs," states Harris. "They suffered real homophobia."[73]

Academic scholarship, including this article, represents the latest phase in the memorialization of the Forty-One, transforming them from cultural icons into objects of scholarly inquiry. As we have seen, for most of the century, the Dance of the Forty-One was a folkloric story with a stigmatized legacy that writers and activists attempted to reform. However, in the 1990s and early 2000s public intellectuals like Carlos Monsiváis began to more seriously consider the Forty-One's relevance to Mexican history. In *Debate feminista*, one of the country's most well known feminist social science magazines, Monsiváis cited the Forty-One as a crucial moment of Mexico's long history of sexuality. By the 2001 centenary, the Forty-One had become formal objects of study and debate for both Mexican and US scholars, with the Tulane University conference dedicated to the scandal.[74]

The elevation of the Forty-One into objects of historical inquiry constitutes what Robyn Wiegman and others characterize as the ardent pursuit of "identity knowledges." As products of disciplinary institutionalization around the study of minority identities, such inquiries are justified by "the right of minoritized subjects to study themselves and to make themselves the objects of their study." They involve, Wiegman argues, an integration and interconnection between histories—the identitarian dilemma in constructing a universalistic "we"—that attempts to construct a global and transhistorical experience of oppression in the hopes of broad liberation.[75] As a result, moments like the dance can be placed in conversation with their counterparts in other countries, such as the 1969 Stonewall riots in New York. Thus, although we must remain mindful of the personal and archival biases that shape how and why we choose our objects of study, scholars can use the identity knowledges already constructed around the Forty-One as an opportunity to further develop the transnational study of sexuality in Mexico.

The Forty-One have had quite the afterlives. They have been revived, reimagined, and readapted countless times since they were dragged out into the streets of Mexico City in 1901, and they show no sign of resting in peace. A controversial piece of national history, their memory has been contested as a symbol of degenerate morality or homosexual pride. By tracing this legacy, we can better see the relationship of historical actors to national memory and how such memories can be deployed for various agendas. As the details from the press reports on the scandal were forgotten, the number 41 became an insult among Mexico's cultural and intellectual

[73] The names are Pascual Barrón, Felipe Martínez, Joaquín Moreno, Alejandro Pérez, Saúl Revilla, Juan B. Sandoval, and Jesús Solórzano. Bertrán, "Un hito," 23.

[74] Carlos Monsiváis, "Ortodoxia y heterodoxia en las alcobas (Hacia una crónica de costumbres y creencias sexuales en México)," *Debate Feminista,* no. 11 (1995): 191–93.

[75] Robyn Wiegman, *Object Lessons* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 4, 13.

elite. However, due to the efforts of writers, scholars, and activists from the 1960s to the 1980s, the Forty-One were revived as historical actors who could vindicate the struggle of burgeoning social movements. Upon closer examination, the memory of the Forty-One also reveals an interesting reckoning with the past and the historical process of appropriation. As intellectuals and scholars in the mid-1990s and early 2000s reconstructed details of the event within the academy, a desire was born to know more about the Forty-One. Grants were sought, sources were found, and the memory was revised to constitute a decisive moment of Mexican history.

On the ground, as the Forty-One were integrated into the culture and vocabulary of Mexico's gay and lesbian community, their image also took on new and radical forms that exceeded activists' initial aims and goals. The end result was a memory that enabled the proliferation of diverse forms of representation beyond homosexual liberation, making the number a symbol of broad inclusion. Even while the seemingly intransigent divides between the old gay liberation vanguard, feminists, queer theorists, and transgender activists and academics persist, moments like the dance remind us how often these histories are as intertwined as they are divergent. The Forty-One are not just a symbol of agency and pride. They are also one of unity.

About the Author

Robert Franco is a doctoral candidate in Latin American history at Duke University, specializing in modern Mexico, gender, and sexuality. His dissertation, "Revolution in the Sheets: The Politics of Sex, Sexuality, and the Family in the Mexican Left," explores the issues of homophobia, heterosexism, and antagonism toward sexual rights in Mexico's left-wing parties and organizations.