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# Los Secretos de la Redada de los 41 (The Secrets of the Raid of the 41): A Sociohistorical Analysis of a Gay Signifier

Lucas E. Espinoza & Rosalva Resendiz

According to scholars, Buffington, Nasser, and Irwin, homosexuality and homophobia in Mexico came to the forefront with the *corrido*/ballad of "*El baile de los 41 maricones.*" In 1901, during the reign of President Porfirio Diaz, forty-two men were arrested in a raid in Mexico City, but only 41 were processed. Half of the men wore feminine attire, while the other half wore suits. Although the dance was a private event, police accidentally uncovered the dance and proceeded to raid the event under the guise that they had failed to procure a permit. Out of the 41 processed, only nineteen were found guilty and punished, and the number 41 became a gay signifier popularized by Posada's print of the ballad/*corrido*, whose author remains unknown.

The broadside boldly prints "*Los 41 Maricones*…" and proceeds to tell details of the dance on November 20th, 1901:

| | |
|---|---|
| Aqui estan los maricones | Here are the fairies/faggots |
| Muy chulos y coquetones | Very cute and coquettish. |
| Hace aun muy pocos dias | It was a very few days |
| Que en la calle de La Paz, | That in the street of La Paz, |
| Los gendarmes atisbaron | The armed police peeped |
| Un gran baile singular | One great singular dance. |
| | |
| Cuarenta y un lagartijos | Forty-one lizards |
| Disfrazados la mitad | Half in costume |
| De simpaticas muchachas | Of charming girls |
| Bailaban como el que mas | Danced like the most |
| | |
| La otra mitad con su traje, | The other half with their suit, |
| Es decire de masculinos | Is to say in masculine, |
| Gozaban al estrechar | Enjoying as they moved |
| A los famosos jotitos… | the famous *jotitos* |

However, other sources state that the raid occurred on November 17th, 1901 in the early morning around 3 AM. Other accounts report November 18th and 19th, while the corrido broadside leaflet reported the 20th (Irwin, McCaughan and Nasser, 2003). The forty-two men at the ball were rumored to be of "high society;" the term *lagartijo* (lizard) in the corrido was about the type of extravagant dress (i.e., the big hats and coat tails) used by the elite. Half of the participants were transvestites, dressed in ball gowns, while the other half were dressed in suits. However, only one was allowed to escape and not be processed (Irwin, McCaughan, and Nasser, 2003; Najar, 2017; Orozco, 2003). Hence, the number originally reported was 42 and later became 41. According to the news, the police raided the dance on the claim that the people had no permit and that it was an assault on public morality (Irwin, McCaughan and Nasser, 2003). The news further highlighted many of these "criminals" to be from well-to-do families as reported by the newspapers *El Diario De Hogar, El Universal, El Popular, El Pais, El Imperial*, etc. (Irwin, McCaughan and Nasser, 2003).

The newspaper, *El Hijo del Ahuizote* criticized the way the matter was handled, as punishment was not equally applied (Barrón Gavito, 2010). Of the 41 detained, those dressed in masculine attire claimed that they were unaware that their dance partners were males dressed in feminine attire and hence were able to buy their freedom. While those dressed in feminine attire  were left to be punished/exiled in order for some normalcy to be restored to the heteronormative expectations of Mexican society (Castrejón, 2003; Sifuentes-Jáuregui, 2002).

The 19 feminine cross-dressers were publicly shamed and forced by the governor to sweep the streets dressed in their gowns. As further punishment, they were to serve in the federal army in the southern border of Mexico. There was much public uproar, as popular sentiment did not approve of such disgraceful males to be part of what they considered a masculine and honorable army. Therefore, the nineteen gays were assigned to serve the federal forces by attending to the soldiers as maids, working in the mess halls as the masculine soldiers fought against the indigenous Mayan uprisings in Yucatan. According to Irwin, McCaughan, and Nasser (2003), it is highly likely that the 19 suffered abuses, sexual assault or worse.

The punishing of the cross-dresser males demonstrated the institutionalization of hegemonic masculinity, using shame and punishment to control gender roles, gender performance/expression, and sexuality. To be gay and masculine could be forgiven with the right payment, but to be gay and feminine was to be publicly denounced, ridiculed and punished. In turn-of-the-century Mexico, homosexuality itself was not a crime, but a violation of heteronormative gender roles.

The arrests and reporting were also influenced and shaped by class privileged. This is very clear when we consider the forty-second gay man —the man who was not processed. Who was the forty-second man? He was none other than the *Hacendado*, Don Ignacio 'Nacho' de la Torre y Mier, a wealthy landowner married to the daughter of Porfirio Diaz. Thus, he was released in order to prevent a socio-political scandal. Before this, his sexual preference was widely rumored in the circles of Mexican high society, as well as questioned by his wife, Amada Diaz. She had resigned to living a lavish lifestyle with a man who did not share her bed.

> Nadie me habla del vicio de Nacho, pero todos lo saben y me compadecen. Que terrible castigo envió Dios a mi vida; muchas deben haber sido mis culpas! La sodomía de Nacho causa asco y burla en la gente, dejando en mi necesidades físicas insatisfechas (lo que ninguna mujer decente debiera mencionar), que solo la practica intensa de la religión me permite soportar (Orozco, 2003, p. 17).

According to Orozco (2003), Porfirio Diaz saved his son-in-law to protect his daughter from embarrassment. In her journal, Amada Diaz remembers the day her father called her to the presidential palace to inform her that her husband was captured in a dance where men were dressed as women. Her father told her that he respected her decision in this matter, but that she had a right to know about her husband, which she had already suspected. Nevertheless, the news of the event became a nationalized scandal, due to the political and moral basis of the time. The news media also took this to the mainstream as Amada's husband image was plastered in Posada's broadside leaflet. In the depiction, Ignacio was shown wearing a gown, as a way to attack his masculinity. However, he had been dressed in masculine attire at the ball when apprehended.

Porfirio Diaz further intervened and had the police records of the raid removed, including the testimonies, court records and even diaries which corroborated the raid and punishment of the 19 feminine gay men (Irwin, McCaughan, and Nasser, 2003; Monsivais, 2003; Najar, 2017). Although the raid was meant to be erased, historian Juan Carlos Harris located the names of some of the detainees from records in the *Suprema Corte de Justicia de la Nación*. Seven of the nineteen filed a writ of *amparo*/protection against their placement in the military: Pascual Barrón, Felipe Martínez, Joaquín Moreno, Alejandro Pérez, Raúl Sevilla, Juan B. Sandoval and Jesús Solórzano (Najar, 2017). Their defense claim was that homosexuality was not prohibited or against the law. The charge was simply changed to crimes against decency, but their punishment remained the same (Monsivais, 2003; Morales, 2018).

Another example of class privilege is the story of Antonio Adalid, who recounted his tale to Salvador Novo, in the book titled *La Estatua de Sal* (Monsivais, 2003). Adalid was the son of Don Jose Adalid, a *caballerango*/horseman and godson to Emperor

Maximillian I, who ruled Mexico from July 11th, 1863 to June 19th, 1867. Monsivais (2003) further explained that Antonio Adalid was known in his woman persona as Toña la Mamonera. In *La Estatua de Sal*, Adalid goes on to provide further details of the night, which contradict the news and the *corrido*/ballad. According to Adalid, the supposed fourteen-year-old boy being raffled at the ball, which was a ritual of prostitution. The young man it turns out was almost twenty-years-old. The *corrido* of *“El Baile...”*goes on to describe the event:

| | |
|---|---|
| Se trataba, segun dicen, | …It was about, or so they say, |
| De efectuar alegre rifa | To conduct a joyful raffle |
| De un niño de catorce años | Of a boy of fourteen years |
| Por colmo de picardías | On top of it all… |

The almost twenty-year-old boy was also named Antonio and Adalid won the raffle as the highest bidder (Irwin, McCaughan, and Nasser, 2003; Monsivias, 2003). Although Antonio, who was engaging in the prostitution act could be considered a form of human trafficking given that according to the *corrido* he was a minor at the time and his body was sold to the highest bidder. The authorities punished Antonio as one of the 19 as he was dressed in feminine attire.

According to Novo’s account Adalid’s family did pay for his release to avoid having him be charged or punished with any crime. His release was further facilitated by the fact that he was not dressed in feminine clothing at the time, but in a suit. His transgression did not violate heteronormative gender role performativity. However, upon his discovery by the public, he was disowned and disinherited by his family. He moved to California penniless and with limited prospects for a job. Upon his arrival in California, he went to confession, and the priest who heard him helped him get a job teaching Spanish at a local college. The other Antonio would later find Adalid, and they were to remain together (Monsivias, 2003).

As a result of the *Gran Redada*, the ballad of “*El baile…”* was published to ridicule homosexuality and gender transgressions against hegemonic masculinity (Sifuentes-Jáuregui, 2002). The primary source that kept the story of the 41 alive was the broadside sheets illustrated by Jose Guadalupe Posada (Irwin, McCaughan and Nasser, 2003). Posada was a premier printmaker known for his broadsides, etchings, and engravings that brought attention to the ridiculous and scandalous (Sifuentes-Jáuregui, 2002). He created a series of engravings to recreate the event.

Amada Diaz, who had been married to Ignacio for a little over 13 years, explained that when news of the story spread, the illustration by Posada depicted her husband dressed as a woman right in the center of the main scene (Orozco, 2003). Amada explained as the media carried the news, "La noticia trascendio al publico merced a una hoja ilustrada donde aparecia mi marido, en caricatura se entiende, vestido de damisela*"* (Orzoco, 2003, p. 45). Hence, this image of homosexuality provided a source of humor. Later other images and depictions of the events that night and the weeks done by Posada were published in 1901 in the newspaper, *El Mundo* that ridiculed the *baile*/dance (Sifuentes-Jáuregui, 2002).

Before 1901, gay activity under the rule of Porfirio Diaz was discreet and kept underground. Mexico had been strong-armed ruled under Porfirio Diaz (1877-1910/11) who was 're-elected' through violent suppression of any political opposition. In 1910, Diaz even went so far as to reinstate himself as the president-elect when he lost to his opponent Francisco Madero. Under *El Porifiato*, the capitalist class and politicians engaged in abuses and injustices against the peasants/*campesinos*. Political unrest grew until it erupted into the Mexican Revolution (Ibañez, 1920; Monsivais, 2003).

As class conflict increased in Mexico, those oppressed and subjugated by the injustices of *El Porfiriato* viewed the President's modernization, alliance with the capitalist foreigners and lifestyles as decadent. With the scandal of 1901, the poor working class associated homosexuality with the excesses/decadence of the elites and modernization as one of the reasons for moral corruption. The press, along with the dissemination of the broadsides further produced and reproduced homophobia. The moral sensibilities of the *campesinos* began to equate high society as effeminate and corrupt, with the peasant male as the true representation of masculinity (Barrón Gavito, 2010; Irwin, McCaughan and Nasser, 2003).

The news and the popularity of Posada's prints went on to popularize the association of the number 41 with gender transgressive homosexuality. According to Sifuentes-Jáuregui (2002), the number 41, from the time of the incident, to-date, has been used to identify, label and disparage people as gay-effeminate/sissy. From 1901 to 1978, gay men experienced worry and panic around the cultural production and mobilization of *"El baile do los 41Maricones"* due to its use in fanning homophobia and sparking hate crimes (Monsivais, 2003).

Irwin (2003) cites revolutionary General Francisco Urquizo, who sees the number 41 as derivative, derogatory, a disgrace, and offensive to the heteronormative male because to use 41 is to call a man passive/effeminate, a lesser being. The number 41 became so offensive that when a person became the age of 41, they would express their age as "30-11 years old" (Irwin, 2003, p.178). As the number 41 became an emblem of homosexuality, the Mexican government and military removed the number from public buildings, license plates, and police badge numbers. This practice reinforced hegemonic masculinity and demonstrated institutionalized homophobia, which also treats the feminine as abject (Sifuentes-Jáuregui, 2002).

Homophobia arose as a tool to reinforce the binary gendered system, but also to divide and conquer the elite. The penny presses of the time further extended this by cross-dressing the political leaders to demonstrate their weakness in order to ridicule them and challenging the masculinity of the bourgeoisie (Buffington, 2003). The measures further perpetuated homophobia and employed a narrative that could be used against the elite.

The *baile* of the 41 became part of the public discourse and as such, the number ‘41’ tied homosexuality to corruption, perversion and intrinsic to the elite. Buffington (2003) argues that the working class further outlined an appropriate working-class model of the masculine as heteronormative. In this way, the people and the press engaged in a rhetoric of homophobia in their attempt to challenge class superiority. In other words, the working class, in conjunction with the press highlighted the case that the elite had become “too soft to control their women… [to] exert their male prerogatives and responsibilities” (p. 218).

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