


ARTICLE

Invisible Geographies: A Study of Migration and Male Homoeroticism in Tijuana through Spinozist Affects

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Abstract

Affect-based studies consider that peoples' lives and behaviors cannot be entirely grasped and understood by rational choice models. The main goal of this article is to understand how factors like sexuality and migration affect the relations between people and spaces. Following Spinoza's *Ethics* and subsequent interpretations, the article considers that bodies are influenced by previous interactions and act accordingly, and that space is a relational mode of substance perceived through attributes and modes affecting individuals and articulating the relationship of space, sexuality, and migration. This research studies same-sex-attracted men who moved to Tijuana, Mexico. Results show that affects (expressed through actions and passions) inform people's relations to space based on their valorization of life events and expectations; that the meanings of space are personally constructed, relational, volatile, and invisible to others; and that most interviewees didn't feel comfortable avowing to the gay identity but identified themselves as such, since, to some extent, gayness can escape from the moral stigma of male-male interaction in Latin America.

Keywords: affects; Spinoza; migration; Tijuana; male homoeroticism; gay men

Resumen

La teoría basada en los afectos considera que hay comportamientos que no pueden ser completamente entendidos a partir de perspectivas racionales. Este estudio sigue dichas teorías y busca entender la relación entre las personas y los espacios. A partir del análisis de la *Ética* spinozista, considero que los cuerpos están influenciados por interacciones previas que los conducen a actúes específicos; y que el espacio es un modo de substancia percibido a través de atributos y modos que afectan a las personas y a su relación con el espacio, la sexualidad y la migración. Este estudio, enfocado en hombres atraídos por otros hombres, concluye que los afectos (acciones y pasiones) dictan la relación de las personas con el espacio; que el sentido del espacio es personal, relacional, volátil e invisible a otras personas; y que la mayoría de los entrevistados no se sienten cómodos con la identidad "gay", pero se identifican así pues escapa del estigma en la sociedad mexicana.

Palabras clave: afectos; Spinoza; migración; Tijuana; homoerotismo entre hombres; hombres gay

Spinoza hasn't been a common source of inspiration in Latin American scholarship. Through ethnographic work and interviews, I explore the motivations of same-sex-attracted men in migrating to Tijuana and how those motivations affect their sense of

place. Although previous research focusing on the relations between people and space has used humanist perspectives, I propose understanding these motivations through Spinoza's theory of affects as actions and passions that drive people to behave in certain ways that often contradict financial or social reasoning.

Research on sexualities in Latin America shows that there is a steadily growing acceptance of same-sex relations, with subsequent legal changes like legal recognition and protection (Navarro et al. 2019). In a near contradiction, violence against same-sex-attracted people has intensified. For Barrientos (2015), this paradox is a consequence of the strong grip of religion in the region and cultural and historical conditions. Navarro and colleagues (2019) conclude that women, young people, and those with higher education levels have more favorable attitudes toward homosexuality. This article concurs with previous research on sexuality in Mexico suggesting that "gay" is a category mostly accessible to middle- or high-socioeconomic-class white or fair-skinned Mexicans; research participants, brown-skinned men coming from low- and middle-class backgrounds, didn't feel comfortable inhabiting the gay identity and instead identified with categories more accessible to the Mexican context.

Migration trends in Mexico have been greatly affected by the relations with the United States. After the North American Free Trade Agreement commenced in 1992, Mexican migrants headed to America, but also to the larger urban centers in Mexico hoping to improve their conditions. In the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, it seems that the United States is no longer the preferred option for Mexican migrants anymore (Sáenz 2015); more recent trends show a substantial decline and suggest the importance of internal migration (Arends-Kuenning, Baylis, and Garduno-Rivera 2019). The results of this research corroborate this hypothesis: none of the research participants wanted to migrate to the United States; they preferred to stay in Tijuana.

In this article, I sustain that affects are relevant to understand people's relations with places and use Spinozian affects to articulate the relation of same-sex-attracted men who migrated to Tijuana, a city that straddles the northwesternmost Mexico-US border. The fieldwork for this research, in the second half of 2017, included semistructured interviews, participant observation, and ethnographic modes of inquiry. I interviewed seven men: six Mexican and one Honduran (ages twenty-three to forty-eight) who had been living in Tijuana for between a year and a half and twenty-five years. All had moved seeking to improve their living conditions through studying or working. I show that the conjunction of migration and sexuality has a relevant impact on the evaluation of space. Additionally, the valorization of space is also affected by social relations with friends, relatives, and partners, because bodies are influenced by previous interactions that dictate their behaviors.

Geographical inquiry from a humanist perspective

Space and place are central concepts of geographical inquiry. The spatial turn, in the late twentieth century, contributed to debates about place and space that were largely unacknowledged in social sciences (Warf and Arias 2013). Previously, the discipline had been widely influenced by positivist and quantitative approaches that considered rational subjects making rational choices. Human geographers promoted a view centered on the experiences of people and space: "The new focus on place, therefore, attends to how we, as humans, are in-the-world" (Cresswell 2009, 4). For Yi-Fu Tuan (1977), space is "more abstract" than place; it is "undifferentiated", and it has no meaning and it starts to be "experienced" through our body: "space is given by the ability to move" (12). Place comprises a location, or distance to other places; locale, or its tangible aspects; and sense of space, or "the feelings and emotions a place evokes" (Cresswell 2009, 1). When space is

used and lived, it becomes place. Tuan (1977) attests that place has been endowed with value in opposition to an unexperienced, unreflected space. Sense of place “brings to the foreground the ways in which human agency actively interprets and narrates the role which place plays in framing emotional feelings and cultural identities” (Qian and Zhu 2014, 81).

Contemporary scholarship on space has been increasingly interested in the body as the center of perception (Low 2003). Merleau-Ponty (1962) was among the first to propose that our body determines our spatial perception. Following Merleau-Ponty, Low (2003) proposes *embodied spaces*, inclusive of body, space, and culture; however, she emphasizes, bodies are shaped by history and society. In opposition to early human geographers who didn't deal with the implications of power and the ideas of humanity itself (Cresswell 2009), or overlooked gender by disembodiment, more recent endeavors in geography are aware that bodies are materially and discursively constructed (Johnston and Longhurst 2010). Consequently, personal space is crossed by difference (Soto 2015), experienced individually, and invisible to others (Fuchs 2007). It can contract or expand (Low 2003) depending on how we are affected by people who alter our perception of closeness and remoteness (Brickell 2015), or by plans and intentions (Lefebvre 1974, in Shmite and Nin 2007). Another important process in the construction of place-based meaning is migration (Qian and Zhu 2014), as experiences of place are based on people's social position as migrants (Qian, Qian, and Zhu 2012). Such perspectives illustrate how the meanings of space are equally influenced by personal experiences, ideas, and materiality. Emotions heavily influence apparently rationally made decisions (Ey, Sherval, and Hodge 2017).

The spatialization of affects

Studying affects is a tool for investigating how not just life is experienced but also how life is shaped in time or space. The turn toward studying emotions in social sciences, beginning in the 1970s, was to understand the role of emotions and affects in people's experience (Lemmings and Brooks 2014). The starting point of this paradigm is the critique of the Cartesian split between body and mind (Aguilar 2014; Cedillo, García, and Sabido 2016; Thien 2005) and the recognition of emotions and affects as epistemological instances (López 2015). In fact, “it is not just that bodies are moved by the orientations they have; rather, the orientations we have toward others shape the contours of space by affecting relations of proximity and distance between bodies” (Ahmed 2006, 2–3).

This article draws on Spinoza's (2004) conceptualizations of affects in his *Ethics Demonstrated in Geometrical Order*, posthumously published in 1677. My interpretation of Spinoza's work is deeply indebted to Lord's (2010) work, unless otherwise stated. Although Spinoza is not a common reference in spatial studies, there have been important debates on his ideas about space and the attribute of extension. For instance, Van Zandt (1986) concludes that objects aren't independent but time-space located, and Lord (2010, 26) proposes that “space is not a container for substances, but a mode of substance.” Space is perceived through attributes and modes and is subject to the affects outlined earlier. Space is affected by the presence of ideas and bodies that construct a specific meaning at a particular point in time.

There are three core concepts in the *Ethics*: substance, attributes, and modes. Substance is defined as “what is in itself and is conceived through itself” (P1D3);¹ attributes as “what the intellect perceives of a substance as constituting its essence” (P1D4); and modes as

¹ Definition (D); Axiom (A); Proposition (Prop); Demonstration (Dem); Chorollary (C); Explanation (Exp); Lemma (L); Postulate (Post); Preface (Pref) and Appendix (App).

“state[s] of a substance, i.e., something that exists in and is conceived through something else” (P1D5). For Spinoza, substance is a continuum that unfolds as being and as perceived being (Lord 2010). Being is independent and inaccessible to individuals, whereas perceived being is perceived through attributes and modes and depends on bodies and minds rather than on being itself (P2Prop16C2). Spinoza considers two attributes: extension and thinking. The former refers to the physical characteristics of bodies (shape, texture, weight), and the latter to thoughts (good, bad, useful). Extension is essential for bodies, whereas thinking is essential for minds. Attributes change over time but never disappear, because we perceive the world through them (Lord 2010).

Spinoza defines affects as “states of a body by which its power of acting is increased or lessened, helped or hindered, and also the ideas of these states” and further divides them into active (actions) and passive (passions) (P3D3). Affect “is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds” (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, 1). Adequate knowledge motivates people to act, and inadequate knowledge acts on people. Minds and bodies desire other minds and bodies because they are judged to be good; therefore, the minds and bodies that perceive them strive to get closer to them because they prompt them to act (P3Prop12). Even if bodies and minds are part of the same continuum, they cannot act on each other (P3Prop2). We perceive bodies and ideas altogether because there are “parallel streams of casualty operating in each of the attributes” (Lord 2010, 54), and bodies and ideas are experienced in the same order (P2Prop7). Results parallelly express in bodies and minds.

Affects have an impact on us with different levels of intensity: strong intensities will last even if what affected us is no longer present; minor intensities will soon vanish (P2Prop18 and P3Prop14–17). Due to parallelism, bodies will be affected too and act as if the other body were still present (P2Prop7n). Affects will be considered as present until they are replaced by a more intense affect of contrary nature (P2Prop17). For instance, when we first knew something, we were embedded in a situation that we will associate with the recently known body or mind. What Ahmed (2013, 29) dubs “stickiness” is “what preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects.” The extent of the affection caused will depend on the nature of the bodies involved (P2L3CA1). Different bodies are affected in diverse ways by the same object; the same body can be affected differently by the same object depending on the moment the two interact (P3Prop51). The intensity of these affects will vary if what we experience has already passed, will happen, or is contingent (P4Prop10–13).

For Spinoza, space doesn't exist independently but in combination with time (Zandt 1986), and objects don't simply “fill up” space; instead, they are finite modes extending certain attributes on spatial extension (Smith 1986; Lord 2010). Consequently, this research understands space as a relational mode of substance located in a specific time-space continuum (Lord 2010), constituted by experiences that inform individuals' knowledge and that leads them to act or to be acted on. This conceptualization allows us to recognize how ideas associated with space are based on bodies and minds, influenced by specific situations, and linked to other bodies and minds. Additionally, the meanings are individually experienced and guide people's behaviors and activities attracting them or pushing them away to certain places.

Homoeroticism in the Mexican context

During the twentieth century, there were various remarkable events related to the public display of male-male desire: the 1903 police raid on a high-class party where men were cross-dressing that came to be known as the “Dance of the 41”; the overt expressions of homoerotic desire by some poets of the group Los Contemporáneos (Quiroga 2000); and the publication of uncensored literature depicting homosexual life in the 1970s

(Schuessler and Capistran 2010). The year 1978 marked the beginning of public visibility. On July 26, a group of homosexual men and lesbian women gathered for the first time in the Frente Homosexual de Acción Revolucionaria (FHAR), marched publicly in the streets of Mexico City to commemorate the Cuban Revolution. On October 2, the FHAR and Oikabeth, a group of lesbian women, marched in remembrance of the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre, and on July 26, 1979, the FHAR and Lambda, a group for homosexuals and lesbians, organized the Great March of Homosexual Pride in Mexico City, which is still celebrated (Diez 2011; Laguarda 2008; Argüello 2014; Vargas 2014). The growing movement halted in the early 1980s with the HIV/AIDS crisis, and gay and lesbian groups didn't reappear until the mid-1990s (Russo 2020). Despite that, a same-sex culture started to form in Mexican society, literary works flourished, police harassment diminished, and gay venues opened in some areas of Mexico City and other states of Mexico (Parrini 2018).

Initially, the category "homosexual" was interchangeably used with "gay." After the 1980s, gay identity became common among young Mexican men who found in it a way to express their same-sex desire and form a collective sense of belonging to a group (Parrini and Hernandez 2012; Argüello 2014; Laguarda 2008). Nevertheless, *gay* is intersected by the specificities of skin tone and class status; fair-skinned and affluent individuals are more likely to identify and be recognized as gay (Vargas 2014). Notions of gayness imported from the United States are constructed on a socioeconomic and cultural basis available just to the middle- and high-classes (Lozano-Verduzco and Rosales 2016; Núñez [1994] 2015, 2014; Laguarda 2004, 2011), which make it unsuitable for most men (Lamas 1998), as I show with the participants in this research. Lozano-Verduzco (2016) shows how three different generations of men constructed their gay identity and have different interests and aspirations according to their ages, social circle, and the information they have accessed throughout their lives. Younger generations have incorporated certain ideas like having longtime partners recognized by their families, in opposition to older generations where such possibilities, let alone same-sex marriage, are unthinkable. Participants in this research resonated with Lozano-Verduzco's (2016) findings. Older generations didn't consider, or aspire to, getting married, whereas younger generations were more influenced and motivated by American interpretations of gay culture in terms of activism and cultural consumption, respectively.

Lozano-Verduzco and Rocha (2015) consider the period 1995–2005 as the consolidation of the movement and from 2005 onward is the fight against homophobia. Regarding the first, organizations combining academia, legal support, and activism started; consequently, the visibility of gay men increased, which favored legal changes. For instance, in Mexico City, two people, regardless of their sex, could legally register as living together in 2007; in 2010, same-sex marriage was approved. However, to be considered legal subjects, same-sex-attracted men must identify as LGBT, which overlooks myriad homoerotic practices. In the specific case of Tijuana, Caraballo (2020) notes that the geographical closeness to the United States facilitated the development of gay communities in Tijuana. Because homosexuality was illegal in California until 1976, Americans crossed to Tijuana to engage in same-sex encounters without legal concerns. Homosexuality only added to the catalog of recurrent deviant behaviors in the city.

American culture has an undeniable impact on Mexican ideas of gayness. For instance, the *Todo mejora México* project, developed after its American counterpart *It Gets Better*, was launched in 2014. Along with this project, the American style of reasoning was imported to Mexico. Ideas like gayness, the closet, and assimilation into society became more common among Mexican same-sex-attracted men. Despite that, the project allowed for an alternative representation that challenged previous depictions of gayness full of negative stereotypes that had flooded Mexican soap operas and television (Ciszek 2017). Access to internet and new media outlets may play a role in the positive evaluation of same-sex marriage in Latin American societies (Diez and Dion 2018). Although

participants, excluding Nicky, didn't mention being affected by American understandings of gayness, they referred to ideas like coming out and aspirations like marriage.

Vargas (2014) proposes splitting scholarship on male-male interaction in Mexico into two main groups: those produced in Anglo and those produced in Latin institutions. However, this split is not unequivocal; some Mexican scholars are working in Anglo institutions. The first group commenced with Carrier's and Taylor's doctoral dissertations in the 1970s. A recurrent idea among Anglo researchers is that there is a clear division between masculine penetrators and effeminate receptors in sexual intercourse (Núñez [1994] 2015; Thing 2010). In contrast, Latin scholarship of same-sex practices, centered in Mexico and mostly carried out by Mexican scholars and institutions (Vargas 2014), has promoted understanding the variability of sexual intercourse among men. Núñez ([1994] 2015, 2014) proposed the concept of sexual existence to show the openness and volatility of desire, as depicted by his and Carrillo's (2018) ethnographies and interviews that show that, for some men, male-male interaction is independent of gay identity.

Because the categories of "gay" and "homosexual" evoke specific ideas and aspirations, in this article I use homoeroticism to address interactions among men that include sexual intercourse, friendship, love, and camaraderie but that aren't limited to them. I prefer this concept, following the work of Núñez ([1994] 2015), who considers male homoeroticism as part of people's sexual existence—in opposition to preference or orientation—that can arise in couple relations, friendship, and camaraderie.

Migration and sexuality

From the 1990s onward, researchers started considering how sexuality and international migration are intertwined (Thing 2010; Lopes 2015). Despite the awareness of that situation, not all research has considered migrants as sexual beings (Epstein and Carrillo 2014). Contemporary scholarship proposes that sexuality is an important factor influencing other spheres of life, such as education, work, and family, and part of what encourages people to migrate (Fournier et al. 2017), and it proposes a wider consideration of migration narratives and incentives that includes love toward friends, families, and partners (Mai and King 2009). Considering migration as a linear event erases several hues of its intersection with sexuality (Lewis 2012), as the relation between migration and sexuality is bidirectional: sexuality influences migration, and vice versa (Kalra and Bhugra 2010).

Among myriad homoerotic interactions, gay men are the most visible because of the combination of sexual encounters and identity formation (Herdt 1988). In their case, migration has been deemed a tool to negotiate events and identities (Lewis 2014; Wimark 2015) or to overtake obstacles (Lewis 2014). In Mexico, around 80 percent of men who publicly express their male-male desire report having experienced violence connected to their public same-sex identification (Lozano-Verduzco 2016). Participants in this research reported that violence and hostile relations following their same-sex desires were important factors motivating their migration. Migration has an important impact on place-based meanings constructed by individuals (Qian and Zhu 2014), and considering such affective components to migration beyond rational choice models contributes to scholarship on space and spatiality (Luibheid 2008).

I understand migration in relation to Spinoza's *Ethics*. Because our essence involves trying to maintain our existence (P3Prop6), we imagine what impels us to act (P3Prop54), and we aim to get closer to the ideas and things that potentiate our capacity to act and fulfill us. In the case of the interviewees, the desire to improve their lives motivated them to migrate, leaving behind the violence and discrimination they experienced in their hometowns: migration is a key component informing their perception of space.

Tijuana

Tijuana's origins are closely tied to the 1919 Volstead Act, which prohibited drinking and gambling in America. Tijuana's touristic industry wasn't planned by the state; it was a consequence of American entrepreneurs and marines (Velázquez and Balslev 2020). Located on the Mexico-US border and having no legal constraints on gambling and drinking, Tijuana became attractive for Americans who opened businesses to serve fellow Americans. The 1929 stock market crash halted tourism, which soon recovered following US involvement in World War II (1941–1945), the Korean War (1950–1953), and the Vietnam War (1955–1975), when Marines were stationed at San Diego Naval Base and crossed into Tijuana (Berúmen 2003). The highly profitable activities created a “dark legend” surrounding Tijuana as “a casino for the southern US” (Ongay 2010, 376). At the beginning of the 1990s, the dynamics of Tijuana–San Diego included waves of migrants crossing back and forth every day, a situation that fostered the claims of nationalist groups in America calling for a wall (Herzog and Sohn 2017), which was built in the mid-1990s (Campos-Delgado and Hernández 2015).

Following 9/11, the United States strengthened its border security plans (Herzog and Sohn 2017), and with the Mexican war on drugs that commenced in December 2006, Tijuana returned to its previous and long-held associations with violence and crime (Palaverisch 2012). Nowadays, Tijuana is the most important city on the Mexico-US border and the sixth largest in Mexico (Alegria 2016), with a population of 1.8 million people in 2015 (Herzog and Sohn 2017). Despite their physical closeness, high-level services, and similar population structures and growth, Tijuana and San Diego have different spatial patterns and little economic convergence (Alegria 2016).

Research participants mentioned that, despite the fact that Tijuana is a big city, they felt welcome. “Here almost everyone is a migrant. They know how hard it is to migrate and they help you,” Luis told me. But participants were not attracted solely by a “welcoming” city, although they certainly benefited from it; there are other imaginations of Tijuana with more impact on their decision to move: the perception that the city is far from their hometowns—granting them a certain freedom—the possibility to cross to the United States, and the “dark legend” of Tijuana as a city of vice. These factors are experienced differently: for Andrés, the dark legend was a motivator (“people don't judge you, don't criticize you”), whereas for Carlos, it was a source of concern. For Nicky, crossing to the United States was of utmost importance; for Joseph, it wasn't.

Methodology

Aligned with Spinoza's proposal on being and perceived being, this research is based on the constructivist assumption that reality is mediated through personal relations and accessible through social constructions (Mason 2007; Valentine 2005). Consequently, knowledge cannot be taken from the empirical world itself; it must be co-constructed through the interaction of interviewer and interviewee. I chose qualitative interviews because they allow interviewees to express their ideas and value them through the description of their life events. Interviews were treated as informal conversations (Mason 2007) and were conducted in places chosen by the interviewees (public parks and their living or working places), with the goal of making them feel more comfortable (Valentine 2005). To preserve their privacy, interviewees chose pseudonyms.

The fieldwork stage of this research spanned from July to December 2017, during which time I interviewed seven men: six Mexican and one Honduran. Their ages ranged from twenty-three to forty-eight years old, and they had been in Tijuana from a year and a half to twenty-five years. I met Leonardo (thirty years old) at a sauna; Nicky (twenty-five) at a university; Luis (thirty-six) at an HIV-prevention workshop; Andrés (forty-eight) and

Joseph (twenty-three) were contacted by other research participants; and Damián (twenty-five) and Carlos (twenty-four) were introduced to me by acquaintances. I conducted several semistructured interview sessions from sixty to ninety minutes. Interviews with Joseph were conducted through phone calls because he was no longer living in Tijuana by the time I was conducting the research. Interviews were voice recorded and transcribed, and a summary was discussed with participants. Some suggested modifications to reflect their feelings more precisely.

The semistructured interviews explored topics like sexuality, migration and life in Tijuana, and in their hometowns. I sought to understand what life in their hometowns was like; the previous knowledge they had about Tijuana and how they acquired it; when they first experienced same-sex attraction, how they acted, and whom they shared with; how their life in Tijuana was; and their current relation with their hometowns. The main interest in asking this question was to understand the extent to which sexuality and life conditions motivated their migration to Tijuana and how such characteristics affect their ideas about the city.

In addition to the formal interviews, I also conducted more informal ethnographic research, including participant observation as I joined them in social activities and observed their everyday life. For instance, I became close friends with Leonardo and Nicky, and we spent time and carried out activities together apart from my research interests. Interactions beyond research purposes have an impact on bond formation. In my case, that interaction was very useful because it allowed me to form friendship bonds and share the concerns and expectations I had, forming a relationship of reciprocity and mutuality between researcher and participants. Participant observation also allows the researcher to situate people's statements expressed in interviews in the context of their everyday lives, placing formal reflections of belief and history in the context of unreflected actions and practices.

The cultural environment of the research participants was, to some extent, the same as mine. We are brown-skinned, lower-middle-class men who like men and migrated to Tijuana from other parts of the country and who found ourselves separated from what we knew before. Like them, I coped with loss that urged me to leave Mexico City and move somewhere else. In this circumstance, I felt very connected to Leonardo, whose recent life events had driven him away from Tijuana. Our shared sociocultural characteristics were relevant to the research, as we shared social events and parties at their homes, and going to bars and saunas, artistic performances, and drag shows. My insider status reduced the distance and facilitated our interaction and the sharing of personal experiences that were quite familiar to me.

Being an insider might have helped participants share information about what they were doing without trying to distort it to make it more refined for academic research. Being in my early twenties, I introduced myself as a student with a university project who was interested in their experiences of migration and sexuality. As they were often the same age or older, they saw me not as an authority but as an equal, and they treated me consequently. In other cases, the fact that I was younger led participants to consider me inexperienced. For instance, Andrés, twenty-five years older than me, once told me, "I know you are a psychologist but let me tell you something: there [in the religious retreat where he lived after his partner died], I understood so many spiritual things that can lift you up when hardships come." Interestingly, in that religious retreat, they didn't completely oppose his sexuality. He negotiated his same-sex attraction and paired it with the bonds he formed therein that have continued for eighteen years after he left. Being an insider, nevertheless, carries some problems, as I was interested in participants experiences and not translating my ideas into theirs (Berger 2015).

Findings

Migration, the meanings constructed in relation to space, and sexuality are intertwined and mutually constitutive. Together, they make a dynamic map containing invisible information that drives peoples' trajectories in the city, attracting or expelling people from certain areas. Interviewees' narratives show how their previous experiences and aspirations construct the meanings of space that organize their lives. Understanding the impact of affect helps us better understand individuals' relations with spaces in ways that can hardly be grasped by rational, factor-centered perspectives. The participants are aware of the sense of place. Damián mentioned that when he first returned to Sinaloa after three years living in Tijuana and "walked around certain places or streets, it reminded me of everything I had lived there: so many good and bad things. It was like a revolution for me to remember all that."

Migrating to Tijuana

Migrating to Tijuana was an important rite of passage for all participants. In general, migration has an important impact on the formation of the sense of space among interviewees, as it shapes the relationship with their hometown, their migration journey, and the city where they arrived. For instance, the ease in reaching Tijuana was very different for each participant: from a three-and-a-half-hour flight from Mexico City in the case of Nicky to almost six weeks of walking and riding the Beast, a cargo rail network that goes northward from the Mexico's southern border and is commonly used by migrants to reach the American border, exposing them to several risks and abuses, as in the case of Joseph.

Nicky is the only participant who had known Tijuana beforehand. Motivated by imaginations of Californian culture common among gay men and knowledge of the city, Nicky decided to move to Tijuana to undertake his postgraduate studies. Leonardo, Damián, Carlos, and Luis had heard about the city before and slowly formed an image that acted on them, attracting them and creating a desire in them based on their imaginations and inadequate understanding. Leonardo and Damián arrived with their families, who supported their stay. For Leonardo, the image of the city was very far from his expectations: "I was expecting skyscrapers, clean streets, organized transit. I hadn't seen pictures of the city; I had only imagined it. But I didn't find that. I found the chaos of the ninth street instead. Even if it wasn't what I expected, there was no turning back, because I didn't want to return to my hometown anymore." For Damián, the city itself was irrelevant since he enjoyed the possibility of expressing his desire as a man and stopped cross-dressing: "Life here is different, it's city life. There are newcomers speaking different languages every day. This was new for me." Damián found out that in a city he could express his same-sex desire with less derision than in his small hometown. The images all the interviewees cherished acted on them and had an important impact on their intentions to migrate. As they got to know the city, their ideas changed.

For Carlos, moving to Tijuana was a job requirement and he accepted, since it offered job security, economic stability, and a lifelong cherished dream more than attraction to the city itself:

I had heard the name of the city and knew that straddled the Mexico-US border. I also heard that it was very ugly. That's pretty much it. When I realized I would be living here, I was a little bit afraid because I didn't know the city, but also because of the dark legend surrounding it. I wondered, "*Chin* [yikes]! What am I gonna do there alone? I know no one there." I was afraid because Tijuana was unknown to me and because of its ill fame.

Leonardo sought to leave his father's control: Tijuana was the easiest option because his sisters had already moved there. Joseph arrived at Tijuana as part of the migrant caravan fleeing Central America and seeking to cross to the United States. Damián migrated to Tijuana escaping the violence exerted by his family and partner. Andrés arrived at Tijuana to cross into the United States: "I wasn't sad when I left Laredo [a city where Andrés lived for some years] for Tijuana because I was with the person I loved, my partner. I also wasn't sad when I left Xalapa [Andrés's hometown] because I was pursuing my dream."

Damián's and Andrés's migration were also motivated by a desire to avoid shaming their families because of their sexuality (Lozano-Verduzco 2015). Somehow, at the beginning, the materiality of Tijuana wasn't quite relevant; they were motivated by the promise of freedom offered by the city. They decided to stay in Tijuana for the combination of desires and expectations and certainly sustained by concrete benefits.

Apart from the interviewees' personal experiences, social relations also shaped their images of the city. Carlos told me, "I think I would have just stayed for my best female friend," but after she was gone, he felt alone and considered moving to another city until he found new friends. Leonardo met a gay friend with whom he started clubbing every week. This friend is one of the few persons who knows that Leonardo likes men, which consequently changed his image of the city. Andrés arrived at Tijuana with his partner, seeking to cross to America; his partner crossed, but Andrés was caught by Border Patrol and deported to Tijuana, where he stayed for four months until his partner returned, and they met again. The city was shaped by the presence of his partner.

Carlos arrived in Tijuana as part of his job as a flight attendant. He arrived on his own and settled with the help of his new workmates, who later became his close friends. In the beginning, Carlos was afraid, because he had a negative image of the city and longed to return to Mexico City. As time passed, his experience of the city changed; he was no longer afraid, nor did he want to return to Mexico City. Carlos doesn't consider his same-sex desire an important fact in organizing his life or related to his migration. In his case, the image of the city is formed by the freedom experienced by living far from his family, earning money, and his friends. Interestingly, for others like Andrés, Tijuana's "dark legend" was the source of support to live in the city. When he arrived, after being deported from the United States, he was cross-dressing and had started working as a sex worker and stripper in different night clubs.

New city, new selves

An important question emerges at this point: why did these men decide to migrate to Tijuana and not to any other cities, especially if some of them weren't interested in crossing to the United States? Some wanted to live in Tijuana; others just wanted to leave their hometowns and found Tijuana to be a suitable option for different reasons. Nicky moved following his aspirations to undertake his postgraduate studies, to get closer to Los Angeles and San Francisco, two cities relevant for gay culture, but he was also interested in the possibilities of crossing the international border back and forth. Additionally, he said: "It implied an escape from the dynamics I had in Mexico City that were leading me nowhere. Even though I was living by myself and seeing my patients—something I had wished for a while—I didn't feel happy; in fact, I felt quite fed up with it."

Nicky found in Tijuana a way to get distance from Mexico City and to experience gay American culture. Luis noticed that Tijuana was the farthest point from Zacatecas and moved to leave behind the violence and disparagement he experienced because of his sexuality. "I am moving to the farthest city in the country so even if I find hardships, I can't return to Zacatecas." They imagined themselves to be different, to change into

another type of person they liked more. The desired they had to change was fueled by the idea of a new city where no one knew them.

Nicky arrived in Tijuana with his boyfriend and had the support of an uncle living there. Tijuana gave him the illusion of getting close to America, not just neighboring San Diego, but to San Francisco and Los Angeles, “in an almost spiritual experience.” Nicky read Gloria Anzaldúa’s work (2015) and grasped the ideas of the “borderland” and *Nepantla*, which in turn motivated him to become a transnational person. In his case, premigration acculturation was an important factor motivating his decision (Becerra et al. 2010). Despite Nicky’s intentions, he doesn’t cross very often because it is very expensive. Having an American visa is a distinction among Tijuanaenses; for certain people the border may be an open door, but for others it’s not at all porous (Montezemolo 2009). His status as a postgraduate student gives him cultural and economic capital, making it easier for him to obtain the visa and changing his perception of the city: “I have money that I can spend, which impacts how I perceive Tijuana.”

For Luis and Joseph, the interactions with other people aren’t as important as their desire to stay in Tijuana. The memories of violence and disparagement they faced in their hometowns as a result of their same-sex attraction are the most important anchors compelling them to remain in Tijuana despite the difficulties. Following Spinoza, the effects of interaction with bodies or minds vary in time and among different people. Luis arrived at Tijuana with a friend. Both were committed to staying despite the obstacles; however, some months after their arrival, his friend returned to Zacatecas and left him alone. Overwhelmed by loneliness and a feeling that the city was hostile, Luis considered returning to Zacatecas, where he had economic and material support, but he refrained from leaving: “Although I still don’t have anything, I am not leaving. When I return to Zacatecas will be because living in Tijuana was a horrible experience, or because it was a wonderful one.” After two years, with a new job and less economic limitations, he felt more capable of staying in the city, meeting other people, buying a house, and contributing to activism, as he had hoped. The hostile city Luis experienced when he arrived was then perceived as friendly and attractive. Now Luis goes back to Zacatecas, interacts with his family, and returns home. The ideas associated with Tijuana give him the strength to return to his hometown.

Joseph grew up in an orphanage in Honduras. His closest relationship was a female tutor who supported and cared for him until he turned eighteen and left the orphanage. With few economic possibilities, he became a sex worker. Chased by gangs of *maras* who were extorting him, he moved to Guatemala and then crossed to Mexico. “When I crossed to Mexico and arrived at Tapachula, I applied for a humanitarian visa and protection, but I was rejected by the immigration authorities. After that I joined the migrant caravan [*viacrucis migrante*] because I had no other options. As I couldn’t obtain humanitarian protection, I thought of buying forged documents.” From there, he joined a migrant caravan heading to the south of the United States. He walked and hopped on the *Beast* for six weeks to travel the four thousand kilometers to reach Tijuana. Once there, he felt liberated from the *maras* and safe. After six months of living in Tijuana, he was informed that his female tutor had left something for him before she passed away. He returned to the southern border but decided not to cross, aware that it would be difficult for him to return to Mexico after the visit. He sought to return to Tijuana but got stuck in Veracruz, three thousand kilometers from Tijuana: he couldn’t travel any longer given his illegal status. He arrived in Veracruz in mid-2017 and has been there ever since, trying to regularize his legal status.

Unlike other interviewees, Joseph didn’t dream of moving to Tijuana when he was young; he constructed the idea of the city during his long crossing of the country, during the short period he lived there, and mostly during the time he has spent in Veracruz longing to return. Although he is far from Tijuana, he dreams and remembers it always,

because he feels it has been better than the rest of the places where he has been: “When I arrived, Tijuana helped me and that impacted my view of the city.” Besides that, Joseph doesn’t have many options: Honduras and Guatemala are controlled by *maras* and the United States requires him to get a visa. The best option he has is Mexico, because despite his illegal status, he is not chased by *maras* or a complete outsider, as he would feel in the United States.

On the variability of affects

The stories reviewed to this point show how Tijuana attracted participants; nevertheless, following Spinoza, affects change depending on the circumstances. Leonardo’s story shows how attraction can quickly shift to repulsion by the presence or absence of a significant other. Leonardo had a three-year relationship that changed his ideas of the city; his boyfriend helped create a city for him. The strong intensity of his relationship expanded to his experience of being in the city. This relationship changed Leonardo’s perception of the city that became a shelter where he wanted to stay: “I took Tijuana seriously because I was in love. I wanted to have a family with my partner. I felt Tijuana had what I was looking for: a job, a partner, a house, a good life. When we broke up, I didn’t want to leave because I had already settled down here, but I felt alone and I had no other option but to leave.” *His* city crumbled, and the space became unbearable; Tijuana itself showed no major changes that same morning.” He felt a strong passion to move out of the place where they were living together. He resigned from his job and for six months avoided any other contact, afraid of meeting his ex-partner until he relocated: “My only option was leaving everything and moving to another city. I didn’t really care about a specific city, as long as it wasn’t here.” Space is influenced by meanings that affect our behaviors but are imperceptible to the rest of the people (Fuchs 2007). Though invisible, that individual sense of space affected Leonardo’s experience and behavior and constrained him to his house and then pushed him away from Tijuana.

The absence of Leonardo’s ex-partner expresses how we are influenced by the presence of certain people. We will consider them present until there is a new and stronger affect that excludes them (P2Prop17/C). Despite the physical absence of Leonardo’s ex-partner, Leonardo felt he was present. This lessened his ability to act, constraining him to stay at home, acting on him. Past or future events affect us as if they were present in that specific moment (P3Prop18). Leonardo didn’t specifically want to go to Minnesota: “I could have gone anywhere. I just didn’t want to be in Tijuana.” After four months, Leonardo missed Tijuana and returned. He asked his friends to be with him because he didn’t want to be alone and run into his ex-partner. “My friends didn’t know that I was in a relation. I was afraid to run into him, but also that my friends would notice that I loved him.” He returned to Minnesota for five months and due to visa constraints, he had to go back to Tijuana, where we met. Almost two years after breaking up with his partner, Leonardo could walk freely in the city; he was no longer afraid of meeting him, but the city they both constructed together doesn’t exist anymore.

Andrés’s narrative reflects how social and erotic relations lead to joy and a feeling of fulfillment and how they expand and contract space (Brickell 2015). When Andrés’s partner died, he “felt lonely, felt that the world ended,” and the image of the city changed for him. He stopped cross-dressing and using drugs and joined a religious retreat thinking that the life he had with his partner perhaps wouldn’t return. Tijuana shrank and became the little room in the religious center where he lived for a year. The experiences he had with his partner remain in his memory and are evoked in the conversations with his old friends that expand the city again and take him to the nightclubs where he worked with his partner. After twenty years, Andrés wouldn’t return to that life without his partner, afraid it wouldn’t be the same.

Leonardo's and Andrés's losses caused similar reactions. Passions affected them and restrained their movements and changed their lifestyles. They decided to leave their past behind and thought that leaving Tijuana, physically like Leonardo or metaphorically like Andrés, would facilitate the process. The city had no major changes but became unbearable for them, and they needed to leave it, hoping that doing so would alleviate their sorrows.

A note on sexual identities

At the beginning of this research, I framed the project in terms of homoeroticism to widen the scope of informants by including those who might participate in homoerotic encounters without identifying as gay. Despite this initial approach, all interviewees identified as gay. However, as time passed, I observed that they used terms like *joto*, *puto*, or *maricón*, frequently with giggles, to address themselves regarding their same-sex desires. Although these words are usually considered insults, they didn't mean to insult themselves, but used these words closer to their sociocultural conditions.

For Nicky, "the way I can express my same-sex desire is through the category 'gay,' even if it's not the one I feel most identified with. It is more of a strategy for me." Their experiences were dependent on their bodies. Crossed by history, their brown skin and physical features influenced their views on Tijuana and possibly restricted them from feeling gay as the (sometimes just imagined) guys on the other side of the border. Research on those terms suggests that the implications vary depending on context (Laguarda 2005), but the words have been mostly used to denigrate lower-middle-class, dark-skinned individuals (Vargas 2014).

Conclusions

Spinoza provides a theoretical framework that challenges the superiority of thoughts over feelings (Thien 2005) and can be used to explain activities and decisions that don't follow rational behavior. This research follows Spinoza's ideas to explain the relations between same-sex-attracted men who migrated to Tijuana hoping to show that affect-centered perspectives are a fertile ground for studying the interconnections of sexuality and space because they can take into account situations that escape rational thinking.

Latin America is experiencing important societal changes regarding same-sex-attracted populations. Legal recognition and protection are increasingly common and accompanied by social recognition (Navarro et al., 2019). As mentioned, sexual identities and categories from the United States context are not simply imported to Latin America. Instead, Latin Americans understand their sexuality following social and cultural factors. In that sense, this article reinforces previous scholarship that supports the idea of a sexual existence, recognizing the variability of the desire and how these men, coming from lower- or middle-class backgrounds, struggle to inhabit an identity that feels extraneous to them. Men choose one or another in formal or informal situations. These negotiations are a strategy to express their same-sex desire despite social, political, and family hostilities.

Same-sex attraction was an important factor motivating migration that was experienced in varied intensities. For Damián, Luis, Nicky, Joseph, and Andrés, Tijuana was an escape from their hometowns and families where they experienced violence, or because they were afraid that expressing their same-sex attraction would affect their families' reputation. In a fast-changing city like Tijuana, they expressed their same-sex attraction with fewer family concerns and were able to meet like-minded people with whom they established friendships or couple relations. Nurtured by a constant influx of migrants, Tijuana allows these men certain anonymity and independence from their relatives, who rarely visit them. Carlos, Nicky, and Leonardo don't consider that their sexuality

influenced their decision to migrate, because sexuality wasn't a source of conflict them with their relatives. On the contrary, they migrated seeking to pursue their dreams and to improve their careers. The materiality of Tijuana, its location as the northernmost city in Mexico, but also the ideas associated with it, affect how participants perceive it: it makes Tijuana attractive for them as it grants them opportunities they didn't have in their hometowns.

In P1Appendix, Spinoza proposes a paradox: "We are slaves precisely because we imagine that we are free" (Sharp 2007, 748). In Spinoza's words "men think themselves free, because they are conscious of their choices and their desires, [but] are ignorant of the causes that incline them to want and to choose" (P1App). Tijuana allows these men to act in certain ways, but they are unconscious of the "real" causes and are instead solely driven by their "goals, ends and purposes." Even if these men think they act on, at some points it becomes clear that they are being acted on.

Migration is dependent on the subject's social position (Qian, Qian, and Zhu 2012) and encompasses the formation of images associated with Tijuana since interviewees first thought to migrate and their subsequent movement. The imagined city affected interviewees and prompted them to migrate (it acted on them); after their arrival at Tijuana, they decided to stay in it (an action following adequate knowledge). Not all interviewees were initially affected by the idea of the city to the same extent. It is a process with varied and variable intensities. This article supports previous scholarship that shows a decrease on migration from Mexico to the United States and instead points to soaring internal migration to urban centers (Arends-Kuenning, Baylis, and Garduno-Rivera 2019).

Affects attract or repel individuals to (or from) specific places. The meanings are variable and influenced by their past, longings, and experiences. For the cases analyzed in this research, the combination of interviewees' circumstances, their sexuality, their bodies, the ideas related to migration, and the city itself formed an invisible geography, an ever-changing image that affects them in different ways. In some moments, their inadequate ideas acted on them; in others, they act on the basis of adequate knowledge. There is an invisible geography experienced individually that decides our movements attracting or repelling us to certain spaces. In summary, space is experienced emotionally by bodies crossed by history, gender, sexuality, and culture, and it is formed by collective experiences and individual events that organize individuals' lives and escape seemingly rational decision-making.

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