



# The Administration of Desire: Governmentality and Sexual Politics in Mexico's Demographic Shift of the 1970s

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## Abstract

**Introduction** In 1974 Mexico adopted a new Population Act which marked a turning point in its policies of migration, fertility and education; this new legislation embraced population as a set of collective regularities ruled by intelligible laws which the state was impelled to administer.

**Methods** Cabinet research in historical archives of 292 documents from the National Population Council in Mexico, published during the first decade of its formulation and implementation (1974–1984).

**Results** Mexican demographic shift of the 1970s shows the emergence of a new rationality of power and knowledge through the consolidation of governmentality as a complex network of practices and discourses, mostly in the fields of education and health.

**Conclusions** There was an effort to reshape the subjectivity of individuals through the incitement and stimulation of a new political rationality, that of governmentality, embracing responsibility vis-à-vis the 'sexual reproduction function', a function which was attached to the reproduction of social structures like marriage and family.

**Policy Implications** I argue that this particular case can contribute to the study of similar political and epistemic tendencies in other contexts, especially on the analysis of the intersection between family planning and sex education policies.

**Keywords** Governmentality · Sexual politics · Biopolitics · Sex education · Family

## Introduction

Declared as 'World Population Year' by the United Nations, 1974 was the year when the First Governmental Conference on Population took place in Bucharest, Romania (United Nations Organization 1974; INED 1974; Connelly 2008). This same year, the Mexican government implemented a major shift in its demographic policies from a pro-natalist to a birth control approach (Turner 1974; Nagel 1978; de Márquez 1984). Therefore, the Mexican state endorsed for the first time in its history a Family Planning programme to be administered through its national health system, the National Population Council (CONAPO) was created, and the first *Sex Education Programme* was formulated two years later. The consequences of this shift have been well documented by several works (de Cosío 1992; Ordorica and García 2010; Welti 2014).

According to 1972 Demographic Yearbook of the United Nations, Mexico had a population of 48,225,238 inhabitants, a

birth rate of 43.2 per thousand and a population growth rate of 3.5% (Holmstedt and SIDA 1974). As stated by government data, Mexico had a birth rate of around 44.4 births per thousand in 1962, rate that was reduced to 40 in 1976, to 32.9 in 1981, and which reached 30.5 births per thousand in 1983 (CONAPO 1984, p. 51); in addition, Mexico's general fertility rate was reduced from 199 in 1970 to 139 in 1981; in turn, for the same period, the average number of children per family went from 3.2 to 2.8 respectively (CONAPO 1984, p. 52); moreover, the number of women of fertile age who were in a couple and who used family planning increased from 11% in 1974 to 48% in 1981, which meant a growth of 5 million new female users. In fact, in 1976, only 16% of women of fertile age in rural areas used family planning methods, while by 1981 this percentage had doubled for the same group of women (CONAPO 1985, p. 72). These figures coincide with other sources that show how the total fertility rate decreased from 6.03 in 1975 to 4.13 in 1981 (Urbina Fuentes and Vernón Cortés 1985), and how the percentage of total active women using traditional contraception methods decreased from 23.3% in 1976 to 13% in 1982, as well as users of voluntary surgical contraception increased from 8.9 to 28.1% in the same period (Urbina Fuentes and Vernón Cortés 1985); besides, several scholars have measured how 'from about 1975–1977 to approximately 1980–1982, the TFR [total fertility rate] in

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Mexico fell by one-fourth’, and how ‘by 1982, about 20 percent of Mexican women in their 30s had been sterilized, and a further 30 percent were using some other method of contraception’ (Pullum et al. 1985, p. 40).

Several works have shown the multiple consequences that the demographic policies of the last half of twentieth century—namely family planning—have had in both global and local contexts; demographic historical research (Connelly 2008; Rosental 2007; Szreter 1993) has contributed to the debate on ‘demographic explosion’ as an epistemic and political tool which supported demographic theories and population policies, and has shown how fertility became integral to the ‘modernization’ process in some countries (Connelly 2008, p. 117; Kahl and Stycos 1964; Livenais and Quesnel 1985); likewise, MacInnes and Díaz (2009) have proposed a comprehensive perspective to analyse classic works and epistemic tendencies on demographic transition theories (Davis 1945; Kirk 1944; Notestein 1945).

In this article, I explore the biopolitical strategies which underpinned the Mexican demographic shift in the 1970s from the perspective of governmentality. Following Michel Foucault’s works on governmentality (Foucault 1997, 2012; Foucault et al. 2004b), much scholarship has contributed to deepening this perspective across a much broader range of both topics and contexts (Burchell and Foucault 1991; de Marinis 1999; Rose 2000; Rose and Miller 1992); some scholars have shown how the rationality of governmentality involves a complex set of strategies of normalisation and individualisation (Dean 2010; Klesse 2007); Binkley has pointed out the relation between neoliberal ideologies with governmentality as a matter of everyday practice (2011). Hence, a major question related to this debate is the relevance that ‘technologies of government’ has acquired in the individualisation of subjectivities grounded in social practices and spaces (Grinberg 2007; Walmsley 2012).

Scholarship on biopolitics has also produced a broad set of works accounting for numerous features of governmentality. Osborne and Rose (2008) have highlighted the relation between sociology and biopolitics as an intrinsic feature in the genealogy of social disciplines, with population as the by-product of a long and epistemic process; likewise, following Rose (2001), the work of Gillies, Edwards and Horsley has focused on how certain welfare reforms might be a corollary of a biopolitical approach in the hegemony of politics of the individual (2016, p. 230); one other distinctive work has been Bashford’s study documenting the history of world health and world population in its relation with global biopolitics (Bashford 2006). Even if some analyses have been focused on education from the perspective of governmentality (Grinberg 2013), the study of sex education policies bonded to biopolitics and governmentality remains largely understudied.

For the Mexican case, two works related to this issue are remarkable: the works of Stern (1999a, b) have analysed how the Mexican eugenic movement in the first half of twentieth

century influenced the institutional education system. Likewise, Díaz’s work is the most recent and well-documented approach drawing on sex education in Mexico, articulating as it does a political analysis with a historical development of social actors embedded in the debate of sexual subjectivities (Díaz Camarena 2013, 2017). In addition, as Amuchástegui has pointed out, Mexican individuals have recently experienced important ‘processes of authorization of sexual desire’ (Amuchástegui 2007), these processes are the consequence of a set of sexual politics in the last decades. Given these developments, I argue that a combined perspective of governmentality and biopolitics applied to one particular case—the Mexican one—can contribute to the analysis of contemporary forms of self-government.

## Methods

The main methods for this study are qualitative, and cabinet research in historical archives of several institutions was used; the text corpus for the core analysis consists of 170 documents from the historical archive of the National Population Council in Mexico (CEDOC-CONAPO), it includes texts of different types (books, magazines, brochures, manuals, guides), produced by different institutions (health, education, medical, trade unions, universities etc.) and authors (physicians, sociologists, civil servants, demographers, sexologists); we included texts of governmental institutions: the Ministry of Health (SSA 1976; SSA and CPNPF 1978), the Mexican Welfare Institutions (DIF 1979; IMSS 1972a, b) and the CONAPO (1977; 1981a, b, c), and non-governmental organizations (UNFPA, OMS, Unesco, UNAM). Selected files have been published on different dates; nevertheless, we have focused our analysis especially on those which appeared during the first decade of the shift in demographic policies (1974–1984). Archives of CEDOC are public, and the selection process began with the CEDOC digital index; such an index works like any digital search engine in which keywords such as ‘sexuality’, ‘sex education’, ‘education on population’, ‘family planning’, among others were launched; this search yielded 42,873 results, of which 3692 files were preselected as a first filter before going in person to CEDOC; during the three months of the collection of documents in 2017, 292 files were examined, of which only 170 were classified, digitized and stored in digital form. From the first filter, the selection criteria for the analysis and study of the documents was composed by the theoretical frameworks serving as an analytical grid for this work: first, the theoretical proposal on governmentality and biopolitics developed by Michel Foucault (1997, Foucault et al. 2004a, b); indeed, using Foucauldian works, we sought to identify in all documents the—political, legal and epistemic—conditions of possibility that led to the emergence and consolidation of sexual education policies in Mexico; in order to achieve this, mobilizing the notion of

‘discourse’ as a set of historical practices articulated by technologies of power and knowledge, and related to each other by a particular rationality was fundamental (Foucault 2008); secondly, the approach of Pierre Bourdieu on the composition of the social space from different fields, as microcosms with their own rules and having specific capitals (1976, 1989, 1994), constituted the other dimension of the analysis grid of this work, since three domains have gradually emerged as areas of relevance for the politics of sex education in Mexico, namely the educational field, the demographic field and the field of health. Drawing on the articulation of both principles let us to arrange a heterogeneous corpus, where the conductive thread could be found in the special attention paid to manuals for the training of government staff in family planning and sex education programs.

## Results

### The Birth of a New Governing Apparatus

In the Mexican case, demographic explosion theories served to legitimise political ideologies of ‘progress’ and health international tendencies since the beginning of family planning policies in the 1970s. Government documents show how institutions set up a distinction between ‘more evolved’ countries and the rest of other nations (SSA 1976, p. 30), as stated in the Ministry of Health manuals where ‘the developed country is rich, educated and with limited population growth [...] the poor country [is] ignorant and with an irrational, that is to say unlimited, population growth[...]’ (SSA 1976, pp. 22–23). Therefore, demographic explosion was clearly enounced in the *National and Regional Demographic Policy Goals and Objectives 1978–1982* (CONAPO 1978), an official Mexican government document which defined Mexico’s first state strategy to include Family Planning and Sex Education programmes.

It was in this document that the Mexican administration established quantitative goals for its growth population rate until the year 2000; indeed, in a meeting in October 1977, the CONAPO established the following population growth rates to be achieved as national population policy goals: 2.5% for 1982, 1.8% for 1988, 1.3% for 1994, and 1% for 2000 (CONAPO 1978, p. 28); this was the very first document to consider the ‘reproductive behaviour’ of population as a political issue, as a matter of state, where a causal relation between ‘reproductive conducts’ and the ‘improvement of social well-being’ was justified and legitimised (CONAPO 1978, p. 18).

It was in this context of demographic ‘pressure’ that sex education policies appeared as a profitable domain, since it was the domain ‘where the most profound, long-lasting and consciously determined changes are made in the demographic behaviour of individuals and families’ (CONAPO 1985, p.

66). For the administration at the time, it was clear that the main task was to focus on the adult individual—notably the adult woman—in order to make her more ‘congruent’ with the new needs of the nation, to make her more reliable, since ‘individual behavioural patterns, attitudes, beliefs and values about sexuality [...] may be distorted or not be consistent with the objectives of individual, family and social well-being’ (CONAPO 1979, p. 3).

Hence, the Mexican government assigned itself the duty to act, it was obligated to ‘correct the wrong’ behaviour for the sake of the individual himself, documents stated as ‘necessary to reorient the social educational process of sexuality’ (CONAPO 1979, p. 5), and also as ‘indispensable to carry out actions that can contribute to the development of behavioural patterns in a more human and compatible sense with the general development of the country’ (CONAPO 1978, p. 34).

It can be observed throughout this whole period to what extent every step the state administration was taking was part of a well-planned strategy, expressed in a wide range of policies; few state policies in Mexico’s history have been so coordinated, and few have enjoyed such support across so many levels and branches of the federal Administration; indeed, in the space of three and a half years, the Mexican state had achieved the construction of a legal corpus which allowed it to enforce the new demographic strategy with a brand-new operational apparatus: On December 31, 1974, an Amendment Act concerning the 4th article of the Mexican constitution was approved. This amendment set down the new ‘right’ promoted by a United Nations resolution (1326, XLIV)—reiterated by the Bucharest *World Population Plan of Action*—(Connelly 2008, p. 238; United Nations Organization 1974, p. B14f) which stated that ‘each person has the right to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children’ (Mexican Congress 1974 DOF: 31/12/1974).

The *Population Act* (1974) and the *Amendment to the 4th article of the Mexican Constitution* were not the only legal tactics for making this new demographic strategy operational; on March 13, 1973—nine months before the *Population Act* was promulgated—a new *Sanitary Code* for the national health system, which embraced family planning, was approved by the Mexican Congress. Furthermore, on November 29, 1973—just twelve days before the approval of the *Population Act*—a new *Federal Education Act* was promulgated declaring family planning as a ‘main priority’ for the educational system in its 5th article (SEP 1973).

Each one of these new legal devices was strategically designed to cover the main branches of governmental action: the new *Sanitary Code* reformed operational practices in the field of health, while in the educational field the *Education Act* introduced a sex education programme with family planning as its axis. For its part, the new *Population Act* established a plan of action for the overall demographic strategy, while the CONAPO served as the leading core director, controlled by

the Ministry of the Interior—under the direct control of the president. Besides, the *Amendment Act* legitimised all the actions vis-à-vis the few oppositions in Congress; finally, a new *Code for the Population Act* materialized the operational details of the strategy by coordinating several ministries under the authority of CONAPO. For the most part, these legal tactics were new practical and operational rules, grounded in a discursive platform set in motion by the ‘demographic problem’ and materialized in the new training for governmental staff in all sectors: education, health, labour, agriculture etc. In a word, a new governing apparatus was implemented.

Even if the implementation of such an apparatus required a high level of interdepartmental collaboration, which have caused some frictions and disagreements reflected in the documents,<sup>1</sup> the success of the main strategy on population can be observed in the effective set in motion of a new rationality of practices in several institutions and spaces. It must be noted as well that the hierarchical model of the Mexican political regime at that time seem to have had a fundamental role in the implementation of the policies, since the few oppositions were easily managed by a presidential political authority; the factors of this process have been well studied (Brachet-Marquez 1984; de Márquez 1984).

In this context, some conservative reactions appeared; historical main opponents to sex education in Mexico were the National Union of Parents (UNPF) and some groups linked with the Catholic Church and the conservative political parties since the beginning of twentieth century—1917 (Arteaga 2002), and 1933 (del Castillo Troncoso 2000)—nevertheless, their influence had diminished in the 1950 decade as Díaz has shown (2013, p. 115). It is in this shift of policies of the 1970s when Catholic bishops declared that the new school books manifested ‘unacceptable ideologies to the Christian conscience and even to human morals’ (Blancarte 1992, pp. 317–318),<sup>2</sup> even though they recognized in the books some contributions as well, and they urged educators and parents to present initiatives that contribute to their modification and improvement; it was the UNPF who showed the greatest opposition to the texts. Although in some Mexican states the pages of the *Natural Science* book were burned in public, the conservative reactions of these particular social actors

did not find an echo in much of the Mexican population, so the reform continued (Díaz Camarena 2013, p. 115).

The articulation of efforts from different social emplacements reveals how Mexican state intervention in sex education was a cultural crusade of biopolitical governmentality. Indeed, both the scope of groups targeted by these policies and the means to reach them, as set down in the *National and Regional Demographic Policy* (1978) and in the *National Sex Education Programme* (1976) demonstrate how important this policy was to the Mexican administration of that time, with each sector and institution mobilized targeting a specific group, and implementing and adjusting specific programmes for each one of them; as a matter of fact, three types of ‘events’ were thought to be implemented by various state institutions: (1) ‘formal’ education events implemented at the elementary school, college and high school levels, for which the Ministry of Education was responsible; (2) ‘informal’ education events conceived as activities ‘outside the scholar system’, the implementation of which was entrusted to family planning clinics, factories and unions; and (3) mass media campaigns on ‘magazines, soap operas, television, radio and movies’ (CONAPO 1978, p. 34).

Throughout the first decade of the demographic shift policies in Mexico, sex education had a large number of meanings. In the so-called formal sector of the Ministry of Education, sex education was reduced to the ‘teaching of the procreative function’ (Leal 1975b, p. 20; see also CIPSS and CPNPF 1979; CONAPO 1979; SSA and CPNPF 1978). For this purpose, a new edition of the textbooks on *Natural Sciences* was published for the sixth level of elementary school, with new contents on the sexual reproduction process in both animals and humans; as for the secondary school levels, the new syllabuses of *Biology* and *Natural Sciences* included general information on the anatomy and physiology of male and female human bodies, in addition to a new emphasis on the importance of hygiene during adolescence, and a new section on family planning (Díaz Camarena 2013; SEP 2015).

Meanwhile, in the health sector, where family planning programmes were implemented, the notion and scope of the term ‘sex education’ included a great number of issues, such as hygiene, health, nutrition, or literacy (CONAPO 1981c; DIF 1979); the *Manual for Rural Communities* set out a list of recommendations, among others: the need to have one specific room in the house for the children and another for the parents, the importance of nutrition for women during pregnancy, the importance of the cleanliness of the house and even some recommendations to eradicate some ‘sexual practices’ like zoophilia in these communities (DIF 1979, p. 82). In order to enforce these new administrative practices and policies, a broad set of manuals and handbooks addressed to the following government staff (physicians, nurses, midwives, teachers, rural promoters and other health professionals) was edited

<sup>1</sup> The archives show some tensions between the General Direction of Family Planning of the Ministry of Health and the CONAPO, regarding the management of the National Program on Population; among the issues raised by this interdepartmental work, mention is made of the lack of consultation of all the institutions (CONAPO 1988, p. 59), as well as a charge of imbalance of financial resources, according to which certain ministries had received a specific budget for the implementation of these policies while others were denied of it (CONAPO 1988, p. 103).

<sup>2</sup> According to Brachet analysis, Catholic Church was internally weakened and divided both among its parishioners and in the same clergy on the issue of the individual’s decision about reproduction; in fact, a part of the Church have adopted the expression ‘responsible parenthood’, promoted by some Vatican texts (de Márquez 1984).

(CONAPO 1981a, 1981b, 1981c; DIF 1979; SSA 1976; SSA and CPNPF 1978). It should be noted as well that what appeared to be an effective mechanism of family planning in the early 1970s, namely the imposition of ‘quotas’ of family planning users on health staff to ‘encourage demand’ for such a service (Alba and Potter 1986, p. 65), ten years later was regarded as a cause of violations of women’s rights, in that such quotas had been interpreted by health personnel as a justification for imposing contraceptive methods on women, such as occlusion of the tubes, several times without their consent. It took more than ten years for the first data to be collected and taken into account for policy reformulation (Figueroa Perea 1994; Perea et al. 1994, p. 139; Urquidi 1984).<sup>3</sup>

### A New Moral Economy for a New Family

Populations living in the rural areas of the country were a priority target of the new policies (García 1976; Simmons et al. 1976); indeed, the emphasis on the so-called rural sector could be observed since the reference to the ‘rural’ was explicitly stated as such in special manuals, handbooks, programmes and plans (CONAPO 1981c; DIF 1979). Certain documents reveal a patently economic bias of family planning policies among different social groups (IPPF 1973). This was particularly explicit in the manual for health staff, where ‘responsible parenthood’ was defined as ‘acquiring a favourable attitude towards the size and quality of the family [...] according to income capabilities’ (IMSS 1972b, p. 15). Both family planning as a tool and responsible parenthood as a condition of economic ‘awareness’ set up another binary distinction between:

The educated classes of Latin America, like their equivalents in other regions, plan their families more or less directly and effectively [...] [they] structure their families mostly in terms of offspring in a congruent, rational way, through the regulation of fertility [...] On the other hand, the ignorant and poor classes lack the most elementary information and the facilities to exercise birth control (SSA 1976, pp. 22–23).

An allusion to the bourgeois family was a by-product of this distribution of social attributes; there was a symbolic distinction defining as ‘educated’, ‘congruent’ and ‘rational’ a particular archetype of families and individuals, in contrast

<sup>3</sup> According to government data, female sterilization increased from 9% in 1976 to 29% in 1982 (Figueroa Perea 1994); besides, almost one fifth of women using intrauterine devices recognized that it was not their decision, but a unilateral decision by service providers, and a quarter of sterilized women across the country declared that they did not receive enough information before resorting to other contraceptive options and the irreversibility of the method (Perea et al. 1994, p. 139).

with the ‘ignorant’, ‘poor’ and therefore irrational ones; the new governmentality motivated individuals to be aware of their economic situation, to ‘foresee’ their future needs:

The possibility of foreseeing the number of children must be accompanied by a better knowledge from the family of the means to earning a living, the consumption of goods [...] the conscious decision to plan the number and spacing of children can reinforce their capacity to have foresight in other aspects, and modify forms of consumption concerning the satisfaction of material and cultural needs. (CONAPO 1978, p. 28).

Moreover, in the majority of documents in the Mexican Population Council of this period, family appears as a key instrument in the regulation of several social situations. In accordance with scholarship studying the family (Rose 1987, p. 70; Collins 1998; Olsen 1983), one of the traditional arrangements of family structures the Mexican demographic shift had to deal with was the public/private dichotomy. In fact, if the main official documents stated that the family was the sole and exclusive agent entitled to make the decision to plan its progeny (CONAPO 1978, 1985)—which guaranteed the separation between private and public spaces—in practice Mexican administration did quite the opposite.

Indeed, Mexican state implemented new and peculiarly intrusive forms of intervention; two innovative techniques of family planning promotion—both described in the *Manual for the Development of Family Planning Activities*—are illustrative of this: the ‘home visit’ and ‘the interview’. The interview was designed to be addressed to the main ‘leaders’ of communities—physicians, union leaders, school principals and priests—the home visit’s purpose was to “obtain information on the way of living, the needs and customs of people” (SSA and CPNPF 1978, pp. 73–74).

CONAPO archives from between 1974 and 1984 show clear state incitement to produce a new moral economy (Thompson 1971) in Mexican society, which was justified by scientific discourse, by state policies and by media campaigns alike. State incitement for a ‘restricted family’ appeared as an injunction of embourgeoisement for all social groups in Mexican society, since individuals were invited to complete higher education, to become an urban work force and to be frequent users of family planning services, in other words, to embrace a particular economic paradigm of society; indeed, just as in another contexts (Connelly 2008, p. 265), the norm of the nuclear family produced a new moral economy for families in societies like Mexico.

According to some scholars, the Mexican family model was rather large and rural before family planning programmes; as stated by Leñero, more than 43% of families in three Mexican metropolises—San Luis Potosí, Morelia and Querétaro—and 45% of families in Mexico City before 1974

were not nuclear families (CONAPO 1984, pp. 168–169). Government data from the 1970 official census and other studies agree on the large composition of family structures before this period (SIC-DGE 1972; Leñero 1970; Simmons et al. 1976); family planning thus became a platform for this new moral economy serving to manage new social expectations of ‘freely decided’ families.

It was this new moral economy which produced the desire to have a small family; hence, since the goal of restricted families becoming the norm in developed societies depended in great part on the willingness of individuals, the volitive dimension of the self had to be stimulated by all manner of incentives, and it was the moral economy of the nuclear family which provided those incentives. The whole Mexican demographic strategy turned out to be a matter of desire; people needed to desire to be modern, to be developed, to be different, in order to gain access—guided by experts and state institutions—to the materialization of their new and ‘free’ expectations. However, these expectations did not come into existence out of nowhere; they were first heard, seen and understood as something desirable; family planning and sex education had to transform population through and by the means of individual desire. It was truly a work of administration of desire (Foucault et al. 2004b, p. 75).

In spite of this new configuration of Mexican family structures, the nuclear family form continued to be very conservative in many senses. Indeed, nuclear family norm not only perpetuated the capitalist forms of consumption by inciting the atomization of family structures (CONAPO 1984, p. 188; Connelly 2008, p. 372), but it also left intact relations of domination like patriarchy, heteronormativity or monogamy. In fact, in some documents special attention was paid to the importance of being a ‘good and true couple’ for the sake of the children: ‘It is important that the son and the daughter realize that their parents are a couple, that they love each other and respect each other [...] It is important, then, that especially at this stage, both the boy and the girl perceive their parents as an integrated and united couple’ (CONAPO 1981c, p. 72).

This shows the strong pillar of heteronormativity as a historical structure of kinship. Several works have identified heteronormativity as one of the basic foundations and axes of domination between the sexes (Marchia and Sommer 2017; Warner 1991), the principal features of which are the naturalized hierarchy between men and women, their supposed ‘complementarity’ due to their reproductive capacity, and monogamy as one of the conditions for the kinship alliance. This ‘complementarity’ between men and women was explicitly evoked in the document *National and Regional Demographic Policy* (1978), since one of its objectives was as follows: ‘Unifying the family, reinforcing the complementary sexual roles of men and women and the respectful treatment between parents and children, and decreasing the sexual irresponsibility which produces single mothers, disintegrated

homes and abortions’ (CONAPO 1978, p. 34). Such a fragment shows a traditional conception of the family, an entity which must be ‘unified’ and composed by a couple made up of a man and a woman, and where the reinforcement of the parental hierarchy upon the children was embraced as well. Thus, the term ‘sexual irresponsibility’ was attached to a multiple causality of facts and situations, among which single mothers, abortion and ‘disintegrated homes’, without defining what the latter term meant.

Paradoxically, another feature of the conservative model of the nuclear family was the assumption that offspring were always present or desired by couples. Indeed, the training models even established the ‘need to have children’ as a ‘basic sexual need’ (CONAPO 1981c, p. 84); birth control being the reason behind the shift in demographic policies, this argument was contradictory to its logic; having offspring was taken for granted across the archive documents, where couples without children were never mentioned. After all, the Mexican demographic strategy of 1974 was a political rationality of management, where sexual conducts were to be guided not in order to change the main structures of society, but to administer them.

In this sense, patriarchy, heteronormativity, monogamy and progeny were perpetuated by the nuclear family through these new Mexican demographic policies, and with them the preservation—with minor changes—of the domination relations they underpinned, the status quo of social reproduction was protected, even reinforced. Therefore, through the new family planning and sex education programmes, individuals were encouraged to behave differently concerning their aspirations regarding the number of children and their forms of consumption, but they continued to desire children, to reproduce capitalist consumption, to form a couple—between men and women—and to perpetuate the monogamist marriage structure.

## A Healthy, Responsible and Conscious Individual

Mexican Population Council archives also reveal how sex education in the 1970s was based on the quest for the very transformation of the individual, on its reshaping into a modern, autonomous and self-governed subject. A true work on the individualisation of subjectivities (Foucault and Ewald 1999, p. 233; Foucault et al. 2004a; Rose 1988, p. 196) was in the background of these policies. Furthermore, their goal was not only to reach the individual as a whole; they were to attain the furthest possible level, the most intimate, the inner-individual level, that locus where decisions were made, in order ‘to form the process of self-determination, the awareness of personal possibilities and the construction of interior models to regulate one’s own attitudes and behaviours’ (CONAPO 1981c, p. 7).

Several scholars have studied how one of the particular features of the rationality of governmentality in the twentieth

century was the constant injunction to regulate oneself (Burchell and Foucault 1991; de Marinis 1999; Rose 1988, 2000). It is precisely for this reason that ‘the conduct’ and the guidance of conducts as a form of government are so relevant from this perspective. Conducts appeared as the leading compass for the individual, and also as the condition of existence for governmentality and its actors, since ‘conducts’ are not only the concrete trace which can be perceived from the individual, but also that which can be measured, calculated and even predicted.

Consciousness was a discursive locus of governmentality, inherited from the modern subject as an innate capability it served as an ineluctable condition to exercise autonomy and to develop agency. This can be observed in the policies emphasis placed on the ‘free’ decision of women—an element taken from the *World Plan of Action* of Bucharest (1974). As a discursive object, ‘consciousness’ was relevant to both family planning and sex education policies because of the way in which the relation between acting and pondering one’s own actions, as a binomial injunction, was conceived. An injunction which was thought of as situated at the most intimate level of the individual (Salas and United Nations Organization 1979, p. 77).

Leñero’s criticism of the notion of ‘volitive and autonomous’ actions was manifested in his works at the time of policy implementation, and he accused their background of being founded in a liberal ideology: ‘From the above is derived an equivocation endorsed by the liberal-individualist ideology in which it is assumed that the demographic actions of birth, mortality, nuptiality, migration, etc., are made by people as a result of individual volitional acts that are to a certain extent autonomous’ (CONAPO 1984, p. 164).

Indeed, subjectivity was embedded in a liberal conception of individuality. The goal of this process of individualisation was that every person acquired an ideal norm, the most desirable ‘pattern’, to rule his/her life, in other words, the capacity to self-govern himself/herself. It is for this reason that the CONAPO secretary, Luisa María Leal, declared it was necessary to create a ‘system of institutional culture, which leads the consciousness of the new generations to teach and learn the patterns to follow throughout their life, in a responsible manner, to perform their reproductive function’ (Leal 1975a, pp. 95–96).

In line with Rose and Miller’s work analysing the installation of self-regulatory techniques inside the very individual (Rose and Miller 1992, p. 193), the large amount of documents relating to Mexico’s 1970s demographic policy shift enables us to argue that governmentality was not so much a problem of regulation, but one of incitement to prevention, of formation and contagion of new subjectivities, in short, a problem of self-government. In this effort to reshape subjectivities, three values were suggested as the ideal core for sexual behaviour—health, rationality and responsibility—, stated

as follows: ‘Healthier, more rational and responsible sexual behaviours, which will be translated into a proper regulation of population growth’ (CONAPO 1978, p. 34). These three principles served as axes of behaviour; they appeared over and over in every programme and handbook, and they were prescribed for every person, old and young, single and married, men and women and so on (CONAPO 1979, 1980; DIF 1979; IMSS 1972b; SSA 1976).

## Normalisation of Conducts and Individuals

In addition to patterns of practices and individualities, patterns of normalisation of behaviour were also prescribed in the official manuals; in other words, a work of normalisation of subjectivities which bonded health to sexuality—in a physical and mental dimension—was in progress. In this process, some sexual manifestations were considered ‘mentally healthy’, and others excluded as a consequence, as stated in some Ministry of Health manuals: ‘For mentally evolved people, that is, those who enjoy what we call mental health, sexuality is the means to manifest the feeling of love and the expression of the most important function of the human being, namely communication’ (SSA 1976, pp. 31–32). In this process of normalisation, the notion of the ‘harmonious development of the child’ (SSA 1976, p. 70; CIPSS and CPNPF 1979, p. 32) was fundamental, as well as that of ‘normal sexual development’ (SSA 1976, p. 72), both of which were used and disseminated in several handbooks for the training of health personnel.

Consequently, individuals who ‘deviated’ from certain norms of development were the object of special attention, and manuals warned about the undesirable ‘psychological damage’ inflicted upon children who could not have the ‘best conditions’ since the very moment of their conception. This ‘damage’ was claimed to result in ‘wild, depressive, violent or cruel beings, deviants, misfits, in whose character is the germ of destruction of the very civilization that we intend to preserve and improve’ (SSA 1976, p. 29).<sup>4</sup> In this work of normalisation, the age of ten years old was prescribed as the ideal standard at which children should be taught about sexual issues.

Furthermore, Mexican institutions started to discuss ‘abnormal sexual behaviour’. Indeed, the *Manual for Teachers* stated that one of the duties of the teacher was ‘to describe deviant or abnormal sexual behaviour, in order to contrast it with the normal and healthy one, as well as to explain the cause and the remedy’ (SSA 1976, p. 72). As a consequence, homosexuality appeared in this manual of the Ministry of Health in 1976, evoked in the following terms: ‘Any young person or boy in an urban environment is exposed to receive

<sup>4</sup> The resemblance with the works of the eugenicist movement of the first half of twentieth century is remarkable (See Saavedra 1967; Stern 1999b).

homosexual proposals and therefore he must know what it is about, what attitude he should take towards this situation, and towards himself too' (SSA 1976, p. 74). In fact, CONAPO archives show that homosexuality was a current topic in several manuals of sex education aimed at the general public during this period, and that it was treated from a pathological perspective (Burt and Brower 1972; Corner 1972; Guttmacher 1973; Kilander 1973). Nevertheless, this was the first time a text emanated from the Mexican state had dealt with the issue.

In addition, since reproductive population trends were flagged up as the result of the sexual behaviour of individuals, the close link between the macro and the micro levels of society allowed state mechanisms to reach into, even invade, the hitherto 'invisible' space of sexual practices and family relations, and it is for that reason that in this work of normalisation the state went as far as a state can go: it prescribed the best conditions for the 'sexual intercourse' among individuals. Indeed, a state document considering the 'sexual needs' of a couple defined the three necessary components for a 'satisfactory sexual intercourse', namely '1) The mutual agreement of both members, 2) an active participation of both, and 3) [the sexual act] has to take place in a suitable place that promotes intimacy' (DIF 1979, p. 42); in another manual, the following specification for the first condition was added: 'both men and women should have the freedom to decide about the sexual act'; and for the second one: 'where the goal is the mutual satisfaction of the participants' (CONAPO 1981c, p. 85). Similar parameters can be found in another CONAPO manual for rural communities (CONAPO 1981c, p. 85). It is hard to imagine any other text of such intrusiveness and explicitness regarding the prescription of sexual and intimate matters by the Mexican State.

## Discussion

This study explored the background of a set of Mexican policies in the 1970s, where a particular conception of sexuality was deployed. In fact, the main 'specific goal' of the first *Sex Education Programme* defined 'sexuality' as 'the understanding and explanation of sexual phenomena as natural facts of life, for a better command of them, and with greater responsibility in making decisions about them' (CONAPO 1978, p. 34). This notion of 'command' was embedded in a perspective of a battle against 'nature', since one of the objectives of these policies was to give Mexican individuals knowledge about sexual issues as 'the most effective weapon to defeat nature and to take advantage of its resources' (Leal 1975b, p. 20).

In this quest to 'command life' and to 'defeat nature' by intervening in 'natural' phenomena, several symbolic distinctions were made with future relevance for state policies: First, the assumed distinction between nature and culture as two evidently separated domains of reality. Second, the

assignment of the sexual reality to the 'natural' dimension of life. And third, the ascription of the principle of causality to the dimension of sexuality, since sexual practices are supposed to be understood as 'natural phenomena' with 'natural laws'.

The incitement to the 'mastery of oneself' was clearly attached with the command of one's body and self-sexual 'function', as well as with responsibility and the consciousness of the individual. These components were the sine qua non conditions for that kind of mastery, as it was stated in the official definition of sex education in the CONAPO *Sex Education Programme*. According to this definition, sex education 'implies a critique of the sexuality spread by culture and a creative attitude that allows the individual to be more master of himself. Education is conceived as the opportunity to raise consciousness and to make the individual responsible for various aspects of sexuality, at the individual, family and social levels' (CIPSS and CPNPF 1979, p. 32). These findings are consistent with a growing body of research suggesting the individual as a self-sufficient and self-regulating entity (Elliott 2014; Rose 2000).

Findings also confirm that from the perspective of several documents, the individual was conceived as ontologically invested with a 'rational' nature. In other words, if sexuality was a 'rational' reality, the subject—as a sexual being—must be such as well. Therefore, if such 'command' of life was to be conceived as the ultimate goal of policies, and of the whole set of state activities, the path to achieve it must be the formation of a cognitive disposition in individuals to assume the whole sexual dimension of life as composed by 'natural facts'. This resulted in the biologicistic emphasis prevalent in staff training and in the formulation of school curricula. Indeed, from the very first revision of the elementary school textbooks (1974), the contents had a clear biological emphasis, focusing on sexual physiology and reproductive anatomy, and it was not until after the Cairo Conference (1994) that Human Rights and Gender Mainstreaming perspective contents were added to primary school textbooks in 1998 (Díaz Camarena 2013; SEP 2015). Additional research on the imprints and influences of the biologicistic approach of sex education in several contexts is necessary to better understand the impact of such a discursive tendency across many societies (Sauerteig and Davidson 2009).

It was precisely because this new subjectivity had to be reliable for governmentality purposes in the 1970s Mexican context that it was necessary to install disciplinary technologies inside the very subject, that is 'technologies of the self' (Foucault et al. 1988), such as many extracts show it:

The National Council of Population proposes as a guiding principle of behaviour a 'responsible self-determination', which consists in taking the appropriate decision in each case after analysing the consequences that an



action may have in terms of the ‘values’ or truly important aspects of human life, which must remain safe in all situations. (DIF 1979, p. 55).

In addition, one of the goals of the *Sex Education Handbook for Rural Population* was ‘to promote the self-determination of people as individuals’ and the ‘stimulation of self-knowledge’ (DIF 1979, p. 13). In line with scholars like Rose, who has analysed how the formation of an ‘individual ethos’ came into alliance with forms of self-government (Rose 2000, p. 329), Mexican forms of governmentality through the demographic shift in policies in the 1970s incited individuals to appropriate this new guiding principle all through their lives.

Several limitations of the current study must be considered while interpreting these findings; first, findings from this study are not necessarily representative of all Mexican state institutions during the analysed period (1974–1984), since the main focus was on the ministries of health, education and the welfare institutions; secondly, the discursive production on sex education outside the governmental institutions is not analysed here, since the goal was to emphasize the state production on the matter; in a third place, concerning the material conditions of the archives of CONAPO, even if some files could not be found physically in the CEDOC installations, the state of the 292 consulted materials was correct and proper, which is remarkable given the difficulties of some Mexican annals (Torres Bautista 2008); furthermore, another limitation could be observed concerning the impact of the textbooks analysed here; since it is difficult to know exactly how they were used in health facilities and schools, further studies could explore in depth this point; however, two conditions inform us on this matter: the first being the number of printed copies of those textbooks,<sup>5</sup> and the second concerns the reports of the health and education functionaries meetings discussing the publication and implementation of policies<sup>6</sup>; finally, this study represents an attempt to explore the historical dimension of sexual politics for an understudied period in the Mexican context in order to analyse a biopolitical crusade through the governmentality approach.

<sup>5</sup> For instance, the four volumes of CONAPO textbooks teaching on Sexuality (1982a, b, c, d) were printed with ten thousand copies to distribute for both the health and educational staff, in addition, the *Handbook for teachers* published by the Ministry of health had 6000 printed copies, which is remarkable in that, for health institutions such as the IMSS, internal texts had an average of 3000 printed copies (IMSS 1983).

<sup>6</sup> Several meetings were held at the epoch between CONAPO secretaries and university directors and health administrators to reform health sector practices, reflecting the importance placed on the need of training and printed materials for personnel (CONAPO 1984; SEP 1984).

## Conclusions

Sex education and family planning, as the new demographic policies in 1970s Mexico, can be analysed as a complex biopolitical apparatus of government. They were the result of the articulation of two parallel and correlative dimensions of governmentality, namely that of a state interest managing the behaviour of individuals regarding the so-called reproductive function, and that of a new rationality vis-à-vis individual expectations and desires on family and sexuality. Intersection between collective interest and individual desire was a constant inherent to this rationality, whose purpose was to reach the very core of subjectivity by installing new patterns of behaviour and technologies of the self. Both dimensions—that of the state management of the bodies and sexual practices, and that of individual self-government and administration of own’s desires—supported and reinforced each other. In consequence, their articulation consolidated a new moral economy as a set of collective arrangements, where the ‘nuclear family’ was legitimised as the norm of society. In addition, a discursive platform disseminated through numerous social fields—health, education, legal, etc.—sustained the functioning of these two dimensions, guaranteeing policies permanence and performance.

The emergence of a new rationality of power and knowledge underpinned the consolidation of governmentality as a complex network of practices and discourses, especially in the fields of education and health. It can be stated that the Mexican case reveals how demographic policies were at the basis of a biopolitical intervention on both the bodies—especially women’s bodies—and behaviours—particularly sexual behaviours—of individuals. This intervention had as backdrop the Mexican state quest for ‘progress’ and ‘development’, where the reshaping and even the ‘improvement’ of individual behaviours was a necessity. If the multiple devices designed by the Mexican state in this shift in policies can be historically documented, the extent of the multiple effects they have had in numerous social fields has to be studied and analysed. Given the intertwined nature of these policies, one can hardly distinguish where political rationality ends and where administration of desire begins, since both are the twin faces of a single and specific biopolitical cause: the government of the bodies and conducts of individuals.

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## Compliance with Ethical Standards

This research has not involved any human participants and/or animals.

**Conflict of Interest** The author declares that he has no conflict of interest.

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