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‘The Small Family Lives Better’: Population Policy, Development, and Global-local Encounters in Mexico (1974–1978)

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This article looks at the implementation and debate surrounding the first comprehensive population policy in Mexico in 1974. Scholars have increasingly focused on the role of external actors for the operation and diffusion of discourses concerning population growth in local contexts. This article sheds new light on such debate by shifting the attention to how Mexican scholars, experts, politicians, and state officials appropriated, debated, and finally intervened in Mexican families with the intention of reducing population growth. Drawing from published documentary material it shows how the fears inspired by a perceived ‘unregulated procreation’ of Mexican families stemmed from a strong social focus on economic growth, as well as the historically specific political vision and academic discourse of ‘modernization.’ In doing that, the article highlights the ways in which self-narratives, localized visions of desired social orders, and gendered assumptions concerning rural populations and lower classes shaped the appropriation of population and ‘modernization’ thought.

What is true, is that the reductions in fertility rates [...] are associated with modernization.¹—Victor Luis Urquidi, 1968

In late October of 1975, a state-sponsored advertisement aired on the Mexican radio and television broadcasting services for the first time. In it, a four-membered family delivered a simple but assertive message: “the small family lives better.”²

¹ Víctor Luis Urquidi, “Política de Población en México: La Necesidad de Planear a Muy Largo Plazo,” in *Obras Escogidas De Víctor L. Urquidi: Ensayos Sobre Población Y Sociedad*, ed. Francisco Alba (Ciudad de México: Colegio De México, 2010), 239.

² *Comisión Nacional de la Familia (CONAPO)*, “La Familia Pequeña Vive Mejor,” 27 March 2014, http://www.conapo.gob.mx/es/CONAPO/27_de_marzo_El_Consejo_Nacional_de_Poblacion_cumple_40_anos?page=2.

For a country where the average family consisted of nine members, the idea that smaller families could be linked with a set of ‘better’ living conditions was both foreign and novel.³ For Mexican demographers, politicians and state officials ‘traditional’ families were instead deemed sites of unregulated procreation. In their view, large families expressed the absence of planning and with it negated the hope that a certain future could be realized by acting on the present in a way that was deemed rational and controlled. From the beginning of the 1970s, and in accordance with a dynamic global scheme of population thought and discourse, large families became sites of heated contestation amongst Mexican experts and politicians, and later objects of state intervention. Such debates were profoundly shaped by the idea that the ‘unregulated procreation’ of Mexican families could hamper the goals of economic growth and national development.⁴ However, the calling into question of matters of human reproduction, and its connection with sustained economic growth, as well as the subsequent actions taken by the Mexican government to regulate reproduction are not solely to be read as expressions of immediate material aspirations. Rather, they are expressions of a historically specific political vision and academic discourse: ‘modernization.’ That is, the desire to orient social organizations towards an industrial mode of production and a centralized bureaucratic state. Notions of ‘modernization’ sought to reorient human activity towards wage labor as a means of attaining individual and collective well-being.⁵ It is precisely this set of debates, assumptions, and visions around the dictum that small families live better that underlies the first comprehensive effort to reduce, plan, and manage population growth in Mexico throughout the 1970s.⁶

³ Secretaría de Industria y Comercio-Dirección General de Estadística, *IX Censo General de Población y Vivienda 1970: Resumen General* (Mexico: Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 1970), 32–44.

⁴ Victor Luis Urquidi, “El Crecimiento Demográfico y el Desarrollo Económico Latinoamericano,” *Demografía y Sociedad* 1, no. 1 (1967): 3.

⁵ Here I draw from the Mexican demographer’s Victor L. Urquidi understanding of *Modernization* as both a process and an end in itself. The full discussion can be found in Victor L. Urquidi, “Política de Población en México: La Necesidad de Planear a muy Largo Plazo,” in *Población y Desarrollo Social* (Mexico City: Asociación Mexicana de Economía Política [AMEP], 1976), 301–318. For recent detailed accounts on ‘modernization’ and modernization theory as historical and cultural constructs, see: Daniel Immerwahr, *Thinking Small: The United States and the Lure of Community Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015) and Michael E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and “Nation Building” in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

⁶ It is important to indicate here that this was not the first time that population control programmes were introduced to Mexico. Already in the 1920s, with the support of the Rockefeller Foundation, Margaret Sanger conducted a number of ‘public sanitation’ campaigns in the Yucatán Peninsula where contraceptives were distributed amongst creole and indigenous women alike. See: Patience Alexandra Schell, *Church and State Education in Revolutionary Mexico City* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003); Margaret Sanger, *La Regulación de la Natalidad. La Brújula del Hogar. Métodos Científicos para Evitar la Concepción* (Mérida: Los Mayas, 1922).

Approved in 1974, the *Ley General de Población* had two long-term objectives: the reduction and regulation of population growth by educating Mexican citizens about birth control and planned parenthood.⁷ Such policy objectives were less related to the creation of better living conditions for people, as the aforementioned campaign claimed, and more connected to the perceived need “to maximize the human and natural resources in the country.”⁸

With the establishment of a population policy in Mexico, it is possible to delineate a moment of rupture in governmental practices. This is the moment when reproduction became the site of state intervention and ‘rational’ centralized planning. Effects of this moment were, for example, the state-official establishment of an ideal number of children per woman,⁹ the assumption that this number of births profoundly affected life and its potentiality,¹⁰ or the articulation of desired familiar structures based on models such as the family of four.¹¹ Furthermore, Mexican politicians, state officials, and experts were convinced that they had found the instruments to realize economic growth through the regulation of human reproduction and in the reduction of population altogether.¹² Finally, the attitudes towards

⁷ Diario Oficial de la Federación, *Ley General de Población* (Mexico: Congreso de la Unión de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 1974), art. 1. In 1977, the recently established National Commission for Family (CONAPO) launched the first nationwide sexual education program (*Programa Nacional de Educación Sexual*) with the explicit intention of educating and informing beneficiaries of the public health services about the “process of human reproduction.” On this subject, see: Matthew Gutmann, “Planning Men Out of Family Planning,” in *Fixing Men: Sex, Birth Control and AIDS in Mexico*, ed. Matthew Gutmann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 100–129.

⁸ *Ibid.*, art. 3, indent I–III.

⁹ Already in 1978, the Mexican left-wing newspaper *Proceso* reports of a ‘successful’ “reduction in fertility rates from 35% in 1974 to 28% in 1978, and it is now sought to reach 25% by 1982.” It is important to highlight the form in which media, experts, and politicians referred to the question of human reproduction in terms of quantifications, which not only conceals the complexity, labour, meanings, and social relations embedded in the process which leads to a child being born. It also allows to reify the latter process akin to something that can be ‘managed,’ ‘molded,’ and indeed ‘reduced.’ See: Federico Gómez Pombo, “Dudas de que la Familia Pequeña Vive Mejor,” *Proceso*, 10 February 1978, <https://www.proceso.com.mx/125395/dudas-de-que-la-familia-pequena-viva-mejor>.

¹⁰ Mexican demographer Francisco Alba reflected on the reasons behind the implementation of the population policy in 1974 saying that “the accelerated rhythm of population growth was on the verge of barricading economic growth, no one thought that [population growth] could be an obstacle for the development process.” See: Francisco Alba, *La población de México: Evolución y Dilemas* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1979), 146.

¹¹ Although the literature in this subject is vast, these are two salient examples on the making of nuclear and conjugal families as idealized modes of social organization in North American contexts throughout the late nineteenth century onwards: Marie Justine Fritz, *House or Home: Nuclear Family Construction and Federal Housing Policy Development* (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 2010); Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, *Mapping the Margins: The Family and Social Discipline in Canada, 1700–1975* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004).

¹² On the conflation between changes in forms of governing and the regulation of bodies and biological life in Mexico, see: Alexandra Minna Stern, “Responsible Mothers and Normal Children: Eugenics, Nationalism, and Welfare in Post-revolutionary Mexico, 1920–1940,” *Historical Sociology* 12, no. 4 (1999): 369–397; Patience A. Schell, “Nationalizing Children Through Schools and Hygiene: Porfirian and Revolutionary Mexico City,” *The Americas* 60,

population policies throughout the 1970s can be read as connected to larger shifts in the practices of government: The *Ley General de Población* of 1974 posited the aggregate of human bodies living in a demarcated territory as a resource to be managed and adjusted according to certain abstractions, knowledges, and interests established by the state.¹³ This moment was also indicative of the thrust of Mexican academic and political élites who saw an opportunity to change the Mexican society through population-planning and reproductive interventions.¹⁴ For them, the urgency of regulating population growth stemmed from the desire to achieve the institutional and material conditions that resembled the social configuration of states that were seen as ‘developed and modern.’¹⁵ These goals were embedded in a vision of ‘modernization.’ The interpretation of the past in terms of a progression from ‘traditional’ to ‘modern’ led scholars to mistake certain contingencies for necessity:¹⁶ They identified ruptures, for example in the emergence of industrial production as expressions of a linear progression referred to as ‘modernization.’¹⁷ Historians agree that the tenets, normative aspirations, and narratives of ‘modernization’ were not limited to academic environments, but were also in circulation amongst political actors and their institutions outside of (but still influenced by) the United States in the context of the Cold War. Here, the ideological visions established by ‘modernization’ theory had real and lasting effects. In the case of Mexico, the question of population policy, and specifically the importance of reducing the size of families, was pursued by actors who had appropriated the visions and teleologies of ‘modernization.’

Taken together, the changes in state praxis and élite discourses associated with population in Mexico are evidence of a deeper rupture in the modes of political thinking and framing dynamics throughout the 1950s and 1970s. Regulating individual behavior, enabling collective corporeal discipline, and modifying the ‘quality of populations’ became a matter of concern for local actors, namely state administrators and experts, as well as global actors and international institutions alike.¹⁸ This multilayered connection became more pronounced with the emer-

no. 4 (2004): 559-587; Alexandra Minna Stern, “The Hour of Eugenics in Veracruz, Mexico: Radical Politics, Public Health, and Latin America’s Only Sterilization Law,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 91, no. 3 (2011): 432-443.

¹³ Michel Foucault, “Lesson 1: January 11, 1978,” in *Security, Territory, and Population: Lessons at the College of France. 1978-79* (New York: Palgrave/Picador, 2007), 1-27.

¹⁴ Arturo Escobar, “Planning,” in *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*, ed. Wolfgang Sachs (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1992), 132-145.

¹⁵ Víctor Luis Urquidi, “Los Recursos Humanos en el Mundo en Desarrollo: Una Perspectiva,” in *Obras Escogidas De Víctor L. Urquidi: Ensayos Sobre Población Y Sociedad*, ed. Francisco Alba (Colegio De México, 2010), 25-50.

¹⁶ Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America*. New Studies in American Intellectual and Cultural History (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 2-6.

¹⁷ Daniel Immerwahr, *Thinking Small: The United States and the Lure of Community Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 2-14.

¹⁸ Regula Argast, Corinna Unger, and Alexandra Widmer, “Twentieth Century Population Thinking,” in *Twentieth Century Population Thinking: A Critical Reader of Primary Sources*, he

gence of 'development' aid projects as concretion of 'modernization' theories in the Western hemisphere after 1960.¹⁹ For example, the emergence of the 'Demographic Transition Theory,' the establishment of the United Nations Population Fund, the International Planned Parenthood Federation and the Rockefeller Foundation, as well as the implementation of different population policies across the 'Global South' highlight these processes.²⁰ Importantly, historians have begun to recognize that 'population' in this context was not only a concept used to express the aggregate of individuals living in a territorially demarcated space, but was also a site where Cold War contentions and divisions, struggles of decolonization, and underlying racial discourses were merged.²¹

Recent scholarship in the history of population control and family planning has increasingly highlighted the involvement of transnational organizations, often sponsored by the United States, advocating for population control in the 'Third World.'²² In the context of the Cold War, family planning programs became one of the tools by which spheres of influence were articulated in non-western countries. Nevertheless, such measures were rarely a one-way street, they were often contested and resisted equally by states, civil society organizations and religious groups who regarded such measures as forms of foreign interventions.²³ Works focusing on Latin America have aimed at conveying the intricate significance and multilayered scope of the population policies introduced between the late 1950s and the early 1990s: Through the language of family planning, they inscribed notions about motherhood, gender, and the role of women into programs of 'national development.' Jadwiga Pieper-Mooney shows, for example, how birth control programs in Santiago de Chile's poor neighborhoods placed the reproductive

Population Knowledge Network, ed. (London: Routledge, 2016), 1–16.

¹⁹ Matthew J. Connelly. *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009); Nancy Birdsall, Allen C. Kelley, and Steven W. Sinding. *Population Matters: Demographic Change, Economic Growth and Poverty in the Developing World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Regula Agast, Corinna Unger, Corinna, and Alexandra Widmer, "Twentieth Century Population Thinking: An Introduction," in *Twentieth Century Population Thinking*, 1–16; Maria Dörnemann and Teresa Huhle, "Population Problems in Modernization and Development: Positions and Practices," in *ibid.*, 150–180.

²⁰ 'Demographic Transition Theory' correlates the lowering of mortality and birth rates with the transition from pre-industrial to industrial national economies. John C. Caldwell, "Toward A Restatement of Demographic Transition Theory," *Population and Development Review* 2, no. 3 (1976): 321–366.

²¹ Axel C. Hüntelman, "Statistics, Nationhood, and the State," in *A World of Populations: Transnational Perspectives on Demography in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Heinrich Hartmann and Corinna R. Unger (New York: Berghahn, 2016).

²² See: Alison Bashford, *Global Population: History, Geopolitics, and Life on Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

²³ See for example: John Sharpless, "World Population Growth, Family Planning, and American Foreign Policy," *Journal of Policy History* 7, no. 1, 1995, 72–102; Adam M. Silva, "Modern Mothers for Third World Nations: Population Control, Western Medical Imperialism, and Cold War Politics in Haiti," *Social History of Medicine* 27, no. 2 (2014): 260–280. Aya Homei and Yu-Ling Huang, "Population Control in Cold War Asia: An Introduction," *East Asian Science, Technology and Society* 10, no. 4 (2016): 343–353.

lives of women at the center of economic and development plans, ignoring local women's voices and their experiences of motherhood.²⁴ Similarly, Raúl Necochea López explores the effects of population control and planning in Peru.²⁵ In his account, governmental interventions, which are rooted in the commitment of the bureaucracy to operationalize modernization theories, are posited as both gendered and racially biased as white Catholic women were idealized whereas the programs were inspired by a belief that *mestizos* had to be sexually tamed, disciplined, and educated according to López' source findings.²⁶

With this in mind, it becomes clear that the debates, discourses and the knowledge that influenced the introduction of population policy in Mexico should be read as connected to a global scheme of exchanges and circulations in population thought. This account focuses on local configurations and dynamics to produce a narrative of how these notions were appropriated and operationalized by Mexican scholars, politicians and experts. In doing so, it is possible to construct an account of a global-local encounter. By engaging with certain demographic theories which correlated population with economic growth and their participation in international conferences on population policy, Mexican politicians and demographers showed their engagement with a global debate on population thought while they localized their experiences through policy implementation. In doing so, they also expressed an adapted understanding of 'modernization' that suited the Mexican conditions and linked the Mexican population to economic growth. However, unlike the aforementioned accounts of population policies in Latin America, neither the debates nor the implementation surrounding the policy in Mexico were first and foremost pursued by foreign actors but rather by Mexican actors themselves. This aspect is relevant as it stresses how global-local encounters do not necessarily remain unmitigated but that these encounters entail constant negotiations, appropriations and mediations across different scales instead. This account approaches the visions, debates and the implementation underlying the *Ley General de Población* on a local scale to discuss wider global dynamics. It does so with the intention of showing how self-narratives, localized visions of desired social orders, and gendered assumptions concerning rural populations and lower classes shaped the appropriation of population and 'modernization' thought.

To that end, the first section discusses the emergence of 'overpopulation' as an assumed problem for policy makers and scholars. This is done in the light of what local politicians described as the 'Mexican Miracle' of steady economic growth in the decades before. The second section of the paper aims to highlight the dis-

²⁴ Jadwiga Pieper-Mooney, *The Politics of Motherhood* (Pittsburgh: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

²⁵ Raúl Necochea López, *A History of Family Planning in Twentieth-century Peru* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014.).

²⁶ *Mestizos* are often defined as mixed populations whose ancestry includes Spanish and Amerindian populations. *Ibid.*, 25–29.

cursive and rhetorical instruments used by Mexican officials, legislators, scholars and experts to promote the introduction of a comprehensive population policy in 1974. This section also discusses how officials working at CONAPO reported and described the implementation of this policy. The attention here is geared towards the question how localized power configurations supported the implementation of this policy.

The Miracle of Development, the Burden of People.

Almost forty years after the revolutionary struggle which led to the disintegration of the last remnants of Mexico's Liberal Republic, legislators and government officials—all of them members of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) which had been in power since 1929—congratulated themselves for the relative political and economic stability in the country.²⁷ From their perspective, this was a direct effect of channeling state resources to produce “a social revolution in Mexico.”²⁸ Between the 1930s and 1970s, Mexican society experienced far-reaching state-lead transformations. This process can be read, following the lexicon of the specialized literature, as a ‘state building process’: From the consolidation of a central authority, by way of violent suppression of local *caciques*,²⁹ to the establishment of state-led institutions to carry out political programs.³⁰ National educational programs were established in order to conduct missions in rural and indigenous communities with the intention of spreading Spanish as the official language.³¹ Public health institutions were designed and consolidated in order to serve both economically disadvantaged groups, as well as civil servants. Oil production and industrial enterprises became the spearheads of state-fostered and state-owned industrialization. Discursively, this process was described by state officials as the assertion of the revolutionary ideals to produce a sense of social justice in the country: If peasants and workers had driven the revolutionary struggle forward to express their grievances and claims, then the post-revolutionary polity

²⁷ Héctor Aguilar Camín, “De la Estabilidad al Cambio,” in *Historia General México*, ed. Daniel Cosío Villegas et al. (México: El Colegio de México, 2000), 133–150.

²⁸ Adolfo López Mateos, “Sexto Informe de Gobierno,” 1 September 1964.

²⁹ Leaders of indigenous groups. See: Michael C. Meyer and William H Beezley, *The Oxford History of Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Luis Javier Garrido, *El Partido De La Revolución Institucionalizada (medio Siglo De Poder Político En México): La Formación Del Nuevo Estado (1928–1945)* (México: Siglo XXI, 2005); Douglas Wertz Richmond and Sam W. Haynes, *The Mexican Revolution Conflict and Consolidation, 1910–1940* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2013).

³⁰ Richard Tardanico, “Revolutionary Nationalism and State Building in Mexico, 1917–1924,” *Politics & Society* 10, no. 1 (1980).

³¹ Fernando Solana Morales, Raúl Cardiel Reyes, Raúl Bolaños, ed., *Historia de la Educación Pública en México* (Coed. Secretaría de Educación Pública y Fondo de Cultura Económica México, 1997).

found its source of legitimacy in the realization of such claims.³² Hence, it became common for reforms, plans, and almost every action within the political arena to be framed as an ongoing revolutionary effort to produce wide-ranging transformations in society—including large scale land and labor reforms, the consolidation of national education programs, and the establishment of a public health system.³³

Towards the 1960s, a new form of describing such interventions emerged that was less concerned with the notion of social justice than in the previous decades and instead committed to claims of national development. This shift can be linked with what the United Nations' called the 'Development Decade'; a coordinated effort to overcome mass poverty through investment, notably in infrastructure, and knowledge transfers.³⁴ In 1962, the first national development plan was presented by the administration of Adolfo López Mateos that established concrete goals based in the abstraction of economic growth, as well as social development.³⁵ These plans to justify the government's policies became an extensive discourse through which state interventions were justified over the next decade. Most importantly, government interventions were generally presented as a means to produce economic growth that was not presented as a means in itself, but an instrument by which the 'improvement of living standards' were to be realized.³⁶ All kinds of economic initiatives, from the collection of data on natural resources and the processing of resources in their respective industries, to the development of tourism at the coasts were rhetorically included in that program.

The change in the objectives and discursive formulation of state interventions was reinforced by changes in the social composition of state agencies and institutions. When middle and high-level positions became increasingly occupied by individuals with a technical expertise,³⁷ those expert administrators became vocal supporters of the change and actively engaged in what they perceived as the

³² Ryan Alexander, "Mexican Politics, Economy, and Society, 1946–1982," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Latin American History*, ed. William H. Beezly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016): 1–20.

³³ Edmundo O'Gorman, *La Revolución Mexicana a 50 Años*, quoted in: Guillermo Hurtado, "Historia y ontología en México: 50 años de revolución," *Estudios Históricos Modernos y Contemporáneos de México*, n. 39, 2010.

³⁴ United Nations Children's Fund, "The 1960s: Decade of Development," <https://www.unicef.org/sowc96/1960s.html>.

³⁵ Oficina de la Presidencia de la República Mexicana, "Planeación del Desarrollo Económico y Social de México," (1962), http://revistas.bancomext.gob.mx/rce/magazines/491/2/RCE_2.pdf?

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ This rupture, or transition, was already illustrated throughout the 1970s amongst political observers, scholars and development experts alike. See for example: Roderic Ai Camp, "The Middle-Level Technocrat in Mexico," *The Journal of Development Areas* 6, no. 4 (1972): 571–582; Merilee S. Grindle, "Power, Expertise and the 'Tecnico': Suggestions from a Mexican Case Study," *The Journal of Politics* 39, no. 2 (1977); Miguel Centeno Castillo, *Democracy Within Reason: Technocratic Revolution in Mexico* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992).

'rational planning' of society.³⁸ These interventions that shaped Mexico's government were based in quasi-technical understandings of social realities, which required the obscuring of complex human relations. Borrowing from Sugata Bose's distinction between normative idioms and means-enhancing instruments of development, it is possible to argue that such instruments became a dominant force in the practices of officials and politicians in the 1960s.³⁹

In this context, Rafael Izquierdo and Antonio Ortiz Mena, two economists working for the Mexican Secretary of Finance and Public Credit throughout the 1960s and for the Inter-American Development Bank in the 1970s, famously coined the term *desarrollo estabilizador*, "stabilizing development," to describe the character of these new forms of intervention in society.⁴⁰ *Desarrollo estabilizador* not only included a set of practices through which the Mexican government sought to create a balance between labor and capital that could render faster economic growth but also achieve broader social transformation.⁴¹ Furthermore, the imaginations of transforming Mexico were not limited to the material conditions and the modes of organizing economic production, they also sought to mold individual practices. For example, this line of discourse favored the creation of a society of 'voluntary wage savers' and 'highly productive employees' as important milestones in the overall transformation that the *Desarrollo estabilizador* promised.⁴² While the notion of social justice never fully disappeared from the political discourse, legislators spoke increasingly rarely of revolutionary ideals of justice for workers and peasants, but rather in terms of specific teleologies of change based in technical representations of reality. These teleologies posited productivity and economic growth as primary foci of state praxis and interest as well as the only instruments to 'improve living conditions' for Mexico's lower classes.⁴³

The shifting character of government interventions, as well as their objectives, reflects the sustained ascension of the economy and the notion of economic growth in the political practice. Matthias Schmelzer argues that the economic growth paradigm, the idea that national economies should continuously and progressively

³⁸ On technical representations of realities and the emergence of technical-oriented modes of governing, see: James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 9–53; James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 25–74.

³⁹ Sugata Bose, "Instruments and Idioms of Colonial and National Development," *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Randall M. Packard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 45–61.

⁴⁰ Rafael Izquierdo, *La Política Hacendaria del Desarrollo Estabilizador 1954–1970* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1995).

⁴¹ Carlos Tello, "Desarrollo Estabilizador: 1962–1980," in *Estado y desarrollo económico: México 1920–2006*, ed. Carlos Tello (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2014) 362.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Gladys McCormick, *The Logic of Compromise: Authoritarianism, Betrayal, and Revolution in Rural Mexico, 1935–1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

expand themselves, became a common policy objective in the second part of the twentieth century.⁴⁴ In Mexico, this shift is connected with a moment in which the rates of industrial output and national income ‘grew’ at unprecedented rates. This ‘Mexican Miracle’ encompasses the years between 1954 and 1976 in which “the real output grew at an average rate of 6.7 percent.”⁴⁵ President López Máteos declared economic growth the chief objective of his administration in 1961 and thereby established a certain political rationality that prevailed throughout his administration and praised instrumental and technical interventions as means to nurture, protect, and accelerate ‘growth.’⁴⁶ The bonanza of these years shaped the imagination of politicians and specialized circles who constructed it as integral part of the long teleology of ‘modernization.’ Drawing from W. W. Rostow’s formulation that societies and states were in a natural evolutive progression towards ‘maturity’⁴⁷—which would include certain aspects such as industrialization, exponential economic growth, mass consumption, and ‘democratic’ decision making processes—Mexico was seen to be on its way to ‘catch up’ with Western states as long as growth rates of the *desarrollo estabilizador* remained on course.⁴⁸

It is precisely in this context of the uncontested preeminence of the ‘economic growth’ paradigm that population growth increasingly became a matter of concern for politicians, economists, and demographers alike. As soon as 1955, Julio Durán Ochoa declared in his book *Población* that the ongoing trend in population growth amounting to 3.0 % per year was a major source of threat for the social and economic order.⁴⁹ The striking assessment of Durán Ochoa lies in the underlying assumption that the practice of governing is that of regulating the reproduction of

⁴⁴ Matthias Schmelzer, “Paradigm in the Making,” in Matthias Schmelzer, *The Hegemony of Growth: The OECD and the Making of the Economic Growth Paradigm* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 34–74.

⁴⁵ Edward F. Buffie and Allen Sangines Krause, “Mexico 1958–86: From Stabilizing Development to the Debt Crisis,” in *Developing Country Debt and the World Economy*, ed. Jeffrey Sachs, (Washington D.C.: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1989), 141–158.

⁴⁶ Oficina de la Presidencia de la República Mexicana, “Adolfo López Mateos: Primer Informe de Gobierno: 1961,” *Informes Presidenciales, Cámara de Diputados del Congreso de la Unión, Servicio de Investigación y Referencia Especializada Subdirección* (2006), 41–43.

⁴⁷ W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 1–5. This is not the place to articulate a full-length discussion of what came to be known as ‘modernization theory,’ it should be sufficient to note here that Rostow sought to construct a linear teleological model to explain what he referred to as ‘Modern History since 1700.’ Such a model posited that changes in economic production and their relations with the cultural, political and social aspects were to be read as stages of growth and ultimately ‘modernization.’ Coincidentally, these changes and processions were first ‘found’ in what he defined as the ‘West,’ and were used as normative measurements of the ‘evolution of all societies.’

⁴⁸ For a more detailed critique, contextualization, and analysis of the construction of ‘modern’ teleologies and narratives amongst Mexican politicians, social scientists, and other groups, see: Gilbert M. Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, and Eric Zolov, *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001): 3–23.

⁴⁹ Julio Durán Ochoa, *Población* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1950), 23–25; quoted in: Manuel Ordorica, *Una mirada al futuro demográfico de México* (México: El Colegio de México/Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2006) 15.

people as a mode of 'facilitating' and 'protecting' economic growth. This reasoning resonated again in 1958 when Ansley J. Coale and Edgar M. Hoover published a study that would become influential and compared fertility rates in India and Mexico in order to conceptualize the "link between population growth and stages of economic development."⁵⁰ In so doing, demographic trends, which included reproductive and mortality rates as well as spatial distribution of populations, were seen as an axis to predict and indicate variations in economic change and growth. The authors asserted that "the reduction in death rates may be ascribed partly to greater regularity in food supplies, to the establishment of greater law and order, and to other fairly direct consequences of economic change."⁵¹

Their observation of a correlation between population increase and economic growth was rather simplistic—but still had a profound impact in India and Mexico, the two countries used for the original and a subsequent study.⁵² More importantly, the authors concluded that both countries would benefit economically from reducing their populations in the generations to come.⁵³ Such conclusions were based in a set of underlying assumptions linked to the visions of 'modernization.' First, it was perceived that both countries were experiencing a transition towards 'modern economic and social orders' designated as industrialization as described above. In the realm of the social, modernization theory assumed that more women would eventually partake in organized and 'productive' labor outside their homes.⁵⁴ Second, modernization theory of Coale's and Hoover's coinage puts forth the image that 'resources and labor' were distributed rationally and naturally across society. Their argumentative strategy suggests that an increase in population endangers such balance. In both cases, the usage of abstract quantifications such as 'labour'

⁵⁰ Ansley J. Coale and Edgar M. Hoover, *Population Growth and Economic Development in Low-Income Countries: A Case Study of India's Prospects* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 1–6. This book was translated into Spanish in 1965 by a Mexico-City based publishing house and became an authoritative voice amongst Mexican demographers including Victor L. Urquidi. See: Ansley J. Coale, and Edgar M. Hoover, *Crecimiento de la Población y Desarrollo Económico* (Mexico City: Limusa Wiley, 1965).

⁵¹ Coale and Hoover, *Population Growth*, 10.

⁵² On the implementation of population planning and control in India throughout the 1970s, see: Matthew Connelly, "Population Control in India: Prologue to the Emergency Period," *Population and Development Review* 32, no. 4. (2006): 629–667; Oscar Harkavy, *Curbing Population Growth: An Insider's Perspective on the Population Movement* (New York: Plenum Press, 1995); Anrudh K. Jain, "The Impact of Development and Population Policies on Fertility in India," *Population and Development Review* 16, no. 6 (1985): 181–198.

⁵³ Coale and Hoover, *Population Growth*, 18–21. This conclusion was repeated 20 years after the original assessment in: Ansley J. Coale, "Population Growth and Economic Development: The Case of Mexico," *Foreign Affairs* 56, no. 2 (1978) 415–429.

⁵⁴ Coale and Hoover, *Population Growth*, 11. On the notion of 'modernity' and the role of women 'becoming productive agents' see: Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967). For a timely critique of the underlying assumption of modernity, and their distinct American dimension, see: Dean C. Tipps, "Modernization Theory and the Comparative Study of Societies: A Critical Perspective," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 15, no. 2 (1973): 199–226.

and ‘resources’ naturalizes the social and political order in which human activity takes place and where natural resources and material conditions come into existence. Finally, the authors assume that the states would dedicate more resources to capital investments if less resources would be required to ensure the wellbeing of their populations. This last point is of particular importance given the first assumption which stressed that the states in question were in the ‘natural progression’ of ‘modernization.’ Hence, the pursuit of such a path acquired more significance than other possible aspects. Taken together, these conclusions presented by the study as well as the assumptions which it articulates unveil a distinct threat for ‘developing’ countries: Unregulated reproduction would impair the prospects of industrialization and economic growth.⁵⁵

Against this background, Mexican economists and demographers sought to accurately establish, if not predict, fertility and population growth rates in the following decade.⁵⁶ Importantly, the main concern was to articulate changes in life, death, and reproduction patterns as factors within a framework of economic development. The projections made by these experts led to an ‘uncomfortable prediction’ of the future: If the Mexican population kept growing at 3.3% annually, its rate of 1960, the state would have to dedicate ever more resources to provide education and health, thus “altering the balance” between labor and resources despite the strong economic growth.⁵⁷ More importantly, this would also bar the state from capital investments to maintain the industrialization process. The experts seem to conclude that people, their bodies and their sexual practices stood in the way of Mexican momentum. Unsurprisingly, Mexican demographers and politicians increasingly saw the urgent need to regulate and reduce population growth.⁵⁸

Population Policy, Family Planning and National Development

The national census of 1960 estimated a total of 34,923,160 people living in Mexico.⁵⁹ The Mexican population had increased by 34.9% in the ten years before.⁶⁰ In a country whose population had barely risen between 1930 and 1950,

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 418–420.

⁵⁶ See for example: Raúl Benítez Zenteno and Gustavo Cabrera Acevedo, “La Población Futura de México: Total, Urbana y Rural,” *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 27, no. 3. (1968). Raúl Alvarado Ruiz, *Mexico: Proyección de la población total 1960–2000 y de la población económicamente activa, 1960–1985* (CELADE/CEPAL, 1969). Louis Ducoff, *Los Recursos Humanos en Centroamérica, Panamá y México. Sus relaciones con algunos aspectos del desarrollo económico* (UN Technical Assistants Program for Population, 1960).

⁵⁷ Víctor Luis Urquidí, “El Desarrollo Económico y el Crecimiento de la Población,” *Demografía y Economía* 3, no. 1 (1969): 102–103.

⁵⁸ Víctor Manuel García Guerrero, *Proyecciones y Políticas de Población en México* (México: El Colegio de México, 2014).

⁵⁹ Instituto Nacional de Geografía y Estadística (INEGI), *VIII Censo Nacional de Población: 1960* (Mexico: 1960) 12.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

such a trend surprised authorities and technical experts alike. Indeed, both politicians and other observers throughout 1960s saw this growth as an expression of the economic bonanza.⁶¹ As late as 1969, President Díaz Ordaz referred to this dynamic as an effect of the wide array of transformations produced by the 'Mexican Miracle.'⁶² Nonetheless, the local and external actors who approached reality from an ideological vision centering on 'modernization' read these changes as problematic and stressed the importance of population controls.

Despite the local and global changes in population and development thought, Mexican decision-makers only engaged with the conflation between population and economic growth quite late and showed different degrees of acceptance. For example, while the burgeoning efforts to predict, envision and form an estimate of population growth in Mexico was primarily conducted by demographers at public institutions, it was not completed until 1966 when the *Dirección General de Estadística*, the General Directorate of Statistics, began to conduct its own population growth projections.⁶³ In fact, these reports, which estimated the population of Mexico to reach 74 million by 1980, did not produce a pronounced change in policy on the national level.⁶⁴ The first official mention of overpopulation and the danger it posed to economic growth appeared in 1970 during President Luis Echeverría Álvarez's inauguration speech:

Today, Mexico faces challenges whose nature and magnitude were not foreseen at the beginning of this century. Since the end the revolution, the population has triplicated. The problems are increasingly acute due to the demand of employment, education, and higher living standards.⁶⁵

With these remarks, President Luis Echeverría began a long journey which would find its end in a policy aiming at the regulation of sexual and reproductive practices of Mexicans. This change can be integrated into the emergence of broader concerns as specific transnational networks and institutions warned of the danger of "global overpopulation."⁶⁶

⁶¹ Ariel Rodríguez Kuri, *Población y Sociedad. México (1960–2000)* (Madrid: Taurus, 2016), 75.

⁶² Oficina de la Presidencia de la República, "Gustavo Díaz Ordaz: Sexto Informe de Gobierno 1969," *Informes Presidenciales, Cámara de Diputados del Congreso de la Unión, Servicio de Investigación y Referencia Especializada Subdirección* (2006), 10.

⁶³ Víctor Manuel García Guerrero, *Proyecciones y Políticas de Población en México* (México: El Colegio de México, 2014), 56.

⁶⁴ Ochoa, *Población*, 23–25.

⁶⁵ Oficina de la Presidencia de la República, "Luis Echeverría Álvarez: Toma de Protesta, 1970" *Informes Presidenciales, Cámara de Diputados del Congreso de la Unión, Servicio de Investigación y Referencia Especializada Subdirección* (2006), 10.

⁶⁶ By pointing out the notion of "global overpopulation," I seek to highlight how different global actors, from the United Nations Population Fund to the International Planned Parenthood Federation, operating in what Matthew Connelly defined as the "Population Control

The signal of the president was rapidly taken up by a group of Malthusian-educated demographers at *El Colegio de México* (COLMEX). The head of the COLMEX Department of Demographic Studies, Victor Luis Urquidi, became one of the most vocal proponents of a regulatory population policy in Mexico. Urquidi argued that unregulated population growth would produce difficult realities in Mexico and endanger its economic prospects.⁶⁷ In 1972, COLMEX organized a symposium to discuss the relations between the importance of reducing fertility rates and the aims of social modernization as well economic growth. The opening speech, delivered by Urquidi himself, gives an impression of his view on the most salient indicators of ‘underdevelopment’ in Mexico:

60% of the population still lives in rural areas; only 30% of people in these areas are economically active [...]. There are a number of setbacks in education, health services, and well-being, [...] all of these conditions produce low incentives to reduce fertility rates.⁶⁸

Urquidi gives a distinct perspective of demographic trends: His analysis sought to assert that there was a conflation between people who were economically inactive, the less educated, rural population and their higher fertility rates, which was reflected in the size of families. The urban, economically active, and educated population had lower fertility rates, and thus smaller families.⁶⁹ Thereby, the question of unregulated population growth was shifted and focalized. Instead of referring to all of the population, it became a question concerning the ‘rural economically ‘less active’ population.’⁷⁰

President Luis Écheverría argued in a similar way when presenting his population policy later in 1974. In the annual address to the Congress of the Union, the president stressed that rationalizing, organizing, and managing population growth were crucial steps in enabling a better life for the ‘poor.’⁷¹ Family planning was

Movement,” raised a wide array of concerns regarding fertility, poverty, access to resources, and the degradation of the environment. Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, 1–12.

⁶⁷ Victor Luis Urquidi, “Política de Población en México: La Necesidad de Planear a muy Largo Plazo,” in *Población y Desarrollo Social*, ed. Asociación Mexicana de la Población (Mexico City: Academia Mexicana de Economía Política, 1976).

⁶⁸ Victor Luis Urquidi, “Simposio de Planeación Familiar,” *Estudios Demográficos y Urbanos*, 6, no. 13 (1972), 410.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 413.

⁷⁰ The argument that ‘unregulated reproduction’ concerned primarily poor countries and that population policies were to be oriented towards them was already in circulation amongst different actors and in it became particularly relevant for the Rockefeller Foundation towards the 1960s, as evidenced by John D. Rockefeller in the conference “A New Look on the Population Crisis” in April 1960. See: John D. Rockefeller, “3rd on a Citizen’s Perspective on Population,” *Population and Development Review* 38, no. 4 (2012): 729–734.

⁷¹ Luis Echeverría Álvarez, “Cuarto Informe de Gobierno del Presidente Constitucional de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos Luis Echeverría Álvarez 1° de septiembre de 1974,” in *Informes Presidenciales*, ed. Cámara de Diputados del Congreso de la Unión, Servicio de Investigación y Referencia Especializada Subdirección (2006), 174–189. For the complete transcript,

not presented as a tool of population control but as a necessary intervention in order to facilitate the development of the Mexican economy and to accelerate the 'modernization' and 'development' of the social order.⁷² As such, the reduction of fertility rates and lowering of population growth was articulated as an efficient, socially as well as economically oriented family planning program as it would later be centralized in the population policy of 1974.⁷³

Later the same year, President Echeverría advanced such a perspective on population and the economic development of Mexico in a speech delivered at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development at Santiago de Chile. He said, "the pace of population growth must be reduced because it is convenient for our countries."⁷⁴ In doing so, developing countries would not only advance their own economic development but would also assert their right for self-determination as President Echeverría argued.⁷⁵ While the solutions to this so-called 'problem' of population growth were often linked to American-led efforts in 'underdeveloped' countries, they were also understood as channels of self-determined national economic and social development.⁷⁶

Mexican officials from different government branches became increasingly engaged with the question of population after 1972. Dr. David Fragoso Lizalde of the Ministry for Health and Hygiene addressed the growing debate concerning family planning by launching a national program to "create awareness amongst parents regarding the great danger and responsibility of bringing a child to this world."⁷⁷ This campaign did not define any clear measures on how such 'awareness' would be attained, nor on its underlying intentions. However, it does underscore a gradual shift towards the aim of creating state-planned strategies of human reproduction in the light of national development. Furthermore, the former Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Antonio Carrillo Flores, presided over the World Population Conference at Bucharest in 1974. There, the official position of Mexico with regards to family planning was phrased in terms of an urgent national necessity "given the human aspirations towards a better quality of life and a faster social

see: Diario de los Debates de la Cámara de Diputados del Congreso de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos. XLIX Legislatura, Año II periodo ordinario, Tomo II, número 3 domingo 1° de septiembre de 1974.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 410–411.

⁷³ Diario Oficial de la Federación, *Ley General de Población* (Mexico: Congreso de la Unión de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 1974), art. 3, indent. V.

⁷⁴ "Unctad: Discurso Del Licenciado Luis Echeverría Álvarez, Presidente Constitucional De Los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, Ante La Tercera Conferencia, Santiago De Chile, 19 De Abril De 1972." *El Trimestre Económico* 39, no. 155 (3) (1972): 665–73.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 672.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Quoted in: Miguel Mora Bravo, *Programa de Planificación Familiar: La Génesis de un Cambio* (México Comisión Nacional de Población: 2016), 100.

and economic development, and because of the interrelation between demographic conditions and economic development needs.”⁷⁸

The intervention presupposed that the introduction of a family planning policy was legitimized at an international level because of its economic benefits in a context of ‘development and modernization.’ The significance of this moment cannot be underestimated. On the one hand, it brought back to the foreground the form in which local actors engaged with the global scheme of population thought by their assumption of a leading role at an international conference. In doing so, the Mexican delegation promoted its perception of the need to regulate populations, yet only in the terms discussed in the first section of this article, namely that ‘unregulated procreation’ would bar countries from fulfilling economic goals.⁷⁹

The line of thought presented at the Bucharest Conference shaped President Luis Echeverría’s argumentation in his speech to the Congress of Union in the same year: “We would make a severe mistake if we do not become conscious of the gravity of population growth and the necessity for political action that it creates for the people and our government.”⁸⁰

In fact, Mexican officials would largely reject the idea that the adopted policy constituted a form of population control. Both at home and abroad, officials and the President himself repeatedly asserted that because there were no clear objective other than reducing fertility and population growth overall, this measure was non-invasive. The stated intention was not to coerce people to use contraceptives or to conduct large-scale sterilization campaigns, but rather to address general necessities of development and growth.⁸¹ At its very core, the law of 1974 had three distinct objectives: first, to regulate the size, distribution, and growth of population in order to adjust demographic trends to the goals of the national economic development plan and social ‘modernization’; second, to conduct national family planning programs with the intention of achieving a ‘rational regulation’ of population growth; and third, to instrumentalize public resources and institutions, from public health to education, in order to intervene, albeit ‘respectfully,’ in demographic trends.⁸²

When finally introduced in 1974, the population policy clearly expressed and reflected the shifts, appropriations, and discourses presented so far for it draw sub-

⁷⁸ United Nations Population Fund, *Plan de Acción* (Bucharest: Conferencia Mundial de Población, 1974).

⁷⁹ United Nations, *Report of the United Nations World Population Conference* (New York, 1975); The Signatories of the World Population Conference of 1975, “Principles and Objectives of the Plan,” in *Plan of Action*, <http://www.population-security.org/27-APP1.html>.

⁸⁰ Oficina de la Presidencia de la República, “Luis Echeverría Álvarez. Tercer Informe de Gobierno,” *Informes Presidenciales, Cámara de Diputados del Congreso de la Unión, Servicio de Investigación y Referencia Especializada Subdirección* (2006), 32.

⁸¹ H. Cámara de Senadores, *Diario de los Debates* (Mexico: Congreso de la Unión de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 16 October 1973).

⁸² Diario Oficial de la Federación, *Ley General de Población* (Mexico: Congreso de la Unión de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 1974), art. 3, indent V.

stantially from the demographic estimations conducted both by Urquidi, and other demographers at *El Colegio de México*, as well as from the Coale and Hoover study.⁸³ Furthermore, the intervention in practices of reproduction, particularly of those who were seen as either 'poor' or economically 'less active,' was presented as a 'technical' measure of 'social adjustment to the needs of maintaining economic growth rates.'

Luis Mario Moya Palencia became the first President of the National Commission for Population in 1974. This institution was created in order to coordinate the effective implementation of the population policy on both the government and social levels.⁸⁴ Already in his inaugural speech, Palencia unveiled his distinct personal zeal stating that, "the unregulated population growth rates have been reflected in the urban centers in overcrowding, pollution, insalubrity, insufficient public services and social tensions."⁸⁵ Again, he presented these social realities as 'technical' problems which were tied to the relationship between space, resources and people. While the first two had been traditionally managed by the state, with the introduction of the *Ley General de Población* it was now feasible to manage the distribution and size of population in order to avoid and revert developments perceived as 'undesirable' and supposedly 'caused' by an unregulated population. It was also clear that the problems associated to overpopulation were not weighed equally, but rather as an expression of 'urban and rural poverty.' These emphases reflect the intimate links between population thought and 'modernization' teleologies presented above. 'Urban poverty' was constructed as an effect of the process of internal migration into Mexican cities, which was at the same time triggered by industrialization and wealth concentration in urban centers.⁸⁶

Hence, it is possible to argue that from the very beginning the objectives of the population policy was to target those less favored by the 'Mexican Miracle' whose role in a 'economically productive' society was unclear. The aims established by the CONAPO itself exemplify the focalized concerns with population growth: "A population policy cannot exist without a full understanding of the rural socio-demographic conditions that will allow to articulate programs according to the needs of this environment."⁸⁷ The aim was to orient the reach of population and sexual education programs to those who were seen as in need of it. When it came

⁸³ Víctor Luis Urquidi, "Política de Población en México: La Necesidad de Planear a Muy Largo Plazo," in *Obras Escogidas De Víctor L. Urquidi*, 239.

⁸⁴ Diario Oficial de la Federación, *Ley General de Población* (Mexico: Congreso de la Unión de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 1974), art. 6.

⁸⁵ "Discurso Del Secretario De Gobernación Lic. Mario Moya Palencia, Al Instalarse El Consejo Nacional De Población, El 27 De Mayo De 1974," *Demografía Y Economía* 8, no. 2 (1974), 263.

⁸⁶ Diane E. Davis, *Urban Leviathan: Mexico City in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994): 174–218.

⁸⁷ CONAPO quoted in Carlos Welti-Chanes, "El Consejo Nacional de Población a 40 años de la Institucionalización de una Política Explícita de Población en México," *Papeles de Población* 20, no. 18 (2014), 33.

to the implementation of the population policy. It is no surprise that the very first beneficiaries of the family planning programs were those social groups affiliated with the National Institute for Social Security IMSS, namely industry workers and peasants.⁸⁸

As shown before, rural communities often concerned demographers and state officials for they were thought to have unregulated practices of reproduction and therefore higher fertility rates. These communities, their sexual practices, and their family structures therefore became important sites of intervention precisely because they did not seem to fit into the self-narratives produced by the ‘Mexican Miracle’ of a country in transition towards ‘social modernization and economic development.’⁸⁹ Instead, they carried the seemingly unmistakable sign of unregulated reproduction of underdevelopment.

Concluding Remarks

This paper sought to argue that the introduction of the population policy in Mexico obeyed the assumed need to maintain and foster economic growth in the country. By the end of the 1960s, Mexican scholars and politicians saw a threat to those goals in the ‘unregulated’ growth of population as well as sign of ‘underdevelopment’ in need of intervention. If ‘development’ or ‘modernization’ were imposed categories of a global discourse to describe the economic and social conditions of what ‘developing’ countries should strive for, Mexican élites appropriated this notion and signified it in terms of population growth, fertility rates, and the size of families in their relationship to economic growth. As they saw higher rates of economic growth as the only way to overcome the problems associated with ‘underdevelopment’—from poverty to the lack of education—population growth was constructed as a central risk for ‘national development.’ As states in developing stages eventually dedicated fewer resources to the well-being of their citizens and more into their economies, the reduction of population growth became a perceived necessity to fulfill the goals of development.

These confluences were rooted in both local and global shifts in population and development thought that also underscore the ascent of economic growth as an end in itself for development agendas. Finally, these efforts are based in a self-constructed Mexican desire to become a ‘modern’ country. The notion that it was feasible to alter the social orders of Mexico was an expression of such desires. In this context, the role of the Mexican population policy was to fabricate a social order akin to those of a ‘modern developed nation,’ a society of smaller families.

⁸⁸ Viviane B. de Márquez, “La Política de Planificación Familiar en México: Un Proceso Institucionalizado?” *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 46, no. 2 (1984), 290.

⁸⁹ Victor Luis Urquidi, “México en la Encrucijada. La Perspectiva del País,” *Letras Libres*, issue 8 (1977).

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