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## **Intimate Citizenship and Social Change in Contemporary Mexico**

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### **Introduction**

This chapter provides an introduction to processes of globalisation and modernisation in Mexico in recent decades and how these have framed public discourses and collectively-shared cultural models of intimate life. The chapter focuses on shifts since the late 1960s, stressing the diversity of Mexico's population and the need to recognise how and why experiences of social change have varied socially and spatially.

Since the 1950s, national data for Mexico reveal significant changes in marital status (see Table 1), with a decline in marriage and an increase in individuals remaining single or living together without legal marriage (consensual union in the language of the census). At first glance this suggests a transformation in a particular form of intimate life, revolving around couple relationships, sexuality and in some cases parenting. However, this chapter will argue that these assumptions about widespread change in attitudes and practices need to be considered more carefully.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Ken Plummer (2003: 30) states that, 'The world over, people continue to confront inequalities that shape their most intimate lives: pronounced inequalities, major imbalances of power between genders, social marginalization based on ethnicity and race, age stratification, and the exclusion of all manner of people who are disabled or otherwise perceived as "different". Experiences of the intimate - loving, child rearing, sexualities, the body, our feelings - need to be mapped onto these dimensions.' Despite significant progress in some sectors, Mexico remains a highly unequal country and, as Plummer suggests, axes of inequality need to be considered when investigating the nature of discourses and practices of intimacy. This chapter draws out differences between rural and urban populations, the importance of class distinctions and variations between different states within the federal system.

The chapter is structured around six main themes: economic transformation; migration; state policies; health and education services; social movements and non-governmental organisations; media and technology. These have been selected as main drivers of social change within Mexico (and the wider world). Some of these are familiar in examinations of intimate life, but as Plummer (2003: 15) argues in relation to intimate citizenship more generally, 'Along with the classical (usually male) public sphere of political participation, several newish sphere also require analysis. These include the new social movements, the mass media and cyberspace' (Plummer 2003: 15).

Given the range of material which will be covered in this chapter, I can only provide a brief overview of trends under the different headings. In their introduction to *Love and Globalization*, Mark Padilla et al. (2007: xii) stress that engaging with globalisation processes, does not mean that forms of intimacy correlate with political-economic forms in a simple way: 'we cannot predict the social expressions of love and intimacy solely on the basis

of the material structures within which they operate.' However, in writing this chapter, I have followed Matthew Gutmann's argument in relation to intra-household relationships: 'The diverse ways in which power is manifested and wielded at the household level do not, however, prevent us from recognising recurrent elements in the wider sociological context' (1996: 8).

As well as outlining and explaining the key trends associated within each of the six themes, the chapter also provides indications of how recent political, economic, social and technological changes are associated with shifts in cultural models or public discourses of intimacy. Many of these ideas are then picked up in much more detail in later chapters.

### **Economic Change**

In the broader context of shifting concepts and practices of intimacy, the role of economic processes have been highlighted (see for example Hirsch and Wardlow, 2006; Hirsch et al. 2009). Within Mexico, the national economy has experienced significant restructuring since the 1980s, with a concomitant shift in the nature of work and the profile of workers; most notably the increase in women in the economically active population.

After the Second World War, Mexico's industrial policies focused on import substitution industrialisation and significant state ownership was associated with rapid economic growth particularly in urban areas. For example, GDP grew on average 7.2% per annum in the period 1960-1970 (World Bank 1980:113). This generated substantial flows of rural to urban migration and levels of urbanisation in the country rose significantly from 41.7% in 1950 (INEGI 2013) to 51% in 1960 and 67% in 1980 (World Bank 1980: 149). In 1965 the Border Industrialisation Program was established in parts of northern Mexico, to attract foreign

investment into assembly factories (*maquiladoras*) producing electronic goods, clothing and other products for the US market. While the original plan was to create jobs for men who may have previously travelled to the USA through the *bracero* programme, which ran 1942-1964, in reality it was women who were often the preferred labour force (Fernandez-Kelly 1984; Salzinger 2003; Wright 2006). However, in the 1980s male participation in the labour force increased greatly and by 2000 about 40% of the *maquila* workforce in Ciudad Juarez were men (Lugo 2008). In the late twentieth century there was also significant state investment in the tourist industry, most notably in Cancún (Torres and Momsen 1995), along with private sector investment in tourist resorts on both the Caribbean and Pacific coasts, which again provided new job opportunities for female labour (Chant 1991; Castellanos 2007).

As part of the strategy of working alongside (some would say co-opting) workers' movements, the unions (in the form of the Confederación de Trabajadores de México, CTM) were a key part of the governance approach of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), particularly until the 1980s. Union membership was overwhelmingly male, reflecting the heavy industry profile of the formal economy. Wage demands were framed around the concept of a 'family wage' to cover all household expenses. Workers in the informal sector, within which women were largely employed, were largely excluded from union activities and the wage and work benefits which accrued to union members.

In the 1970s, Mexican economic growth began to slow down and the government's ability to repay its foreign loans, taken out during the boom period, was threatened. Finally in 1982, the government defaulted on its debt repayments. As part of IMF financial support, structural adjustment programmes were introduced, reducing the role of the state and opening up the

Mexican economy to much greater foreign competition and investment. Investment was spatially concentrated, particularly in the *maquiladoras* of Northern Mexico and in key tourist locations. Meanwhile foreign competition was undermining domestic industry and the rising cost of imports, due to currency devaluation contributed to increasing economic stress for many households. Additionally, the rolling back of the Mexican state, not just as an employer, but also through provision of subsidies to poorer households, exacerbated the rising poverty levels.

Within this context, of rising demand for female labour in certain parts of the country, and increasing household need for income, women's involvement in the paid labour force increased significantly (Chant, 1991, 1992). Between 1970 and 1990 the proportion of the population aged 12 and over who were economically active increased from 42.6% to 43.04%. However, this increase was due to the rising percentage of women entering the paid labour force as the proportion of men who were economically active declined (see Table 2). The relationship between the growth in women's paid labour and the nature of intimacy is not a simple one, not least because of the heterogeneity of women and employment sectors, as well the different forms of intimate relations that they are entwined in. Assumptions are sometimes made that entry into the paid labour force provides women with new opportunities to challenge patriarchal norms in the household, whether that be in relation to a husband, partner, father or other male kin. However, as Sharon McClenaghan (1997) argues in relation to the Dominican Republic, this is a simplistic and romantic vision of the empowering nature of paid work. In some contexts, however, there is evidence of shifts in domestic life associated with women's paid work. Altha Cravey (1998) for example, compares what she terms the 'new factory regime' of both men and women in paid employment in Nogales with

the 'old factory regime' of the lone male breadwinner and full-time housewife in Ciudad Madero.

[INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Leslie Gates (2002) outlines a more detailed study of bargaining strategies within households where wives and/or daughters work in factories in Ciudad Juarez. While entry into the paid labour force may represent a shift in widely-practised, but not universal gender divisions of labour, the operation of patriarchal norms within bargaining practices suggests that intimate relations made not have been transformed as much as some might claim. In Gates' study, women who 'withdrew services' as a bargaining strategy with their male partners or fathers were much less likely to be successful than those who 'provided services'. For example refusing to have sex, or do particular domestic chores were less successful for women negotiating with their partners than promising they would have sex or complete chores. While the economic language of bargaining and negotiation may seem somewhat divorced from intimate relations which are often idealised with regard to emotions such as love, it does reflect the give and take of social interactions and the mundane dimensions of intimacy. Of course, in some heterosexual couple relationships, women's entry into the labour force can lead to increased tensions and domestic violence as men feel undermined or threatened by women's move into the sphere of paid work (López and Salles 2006: 461).

Rising women's participation in the paid labour force often provides opportunities to both meet people and to find out about other perspectives, for example about relationships. This is similar to the role of educational spaces discussed below. However, not all forms of employment facilitate encounters with potential partners or socialising with other workers.

Domestic service is, for example, notable in its potential isolation, particularly for domestic workers who live in their employers' homes (Goldsmith 1989). Additionally, while household members may be happy with women entering paid employment outside the home, discourses around inappropriate behaviour, dress and relationships may be mobilised to critique particular groups of women. Melissa Wright (2005) in her work on the campaigns around the 'femicide' in Ciudad Juarez, discusses the framings about 'good women' that are mobilised by different groups. For those calling the authorities to account for the failures in finding the perpetrators, notions of 'good daughters' stressing modesty and hard work are used. This is to counter claims that murdered women 'deserved it' because they were promiscuous. Wright uses the term 'paradox' to encapsulate the tensions between feminist organisations and individuals who are campaigning for women's rights to choose the lives they want, while having to use models of women's behaviour that fit conservative, patriarchal norms.

## **Migration**

Migration, both internationally and internally, can provide new possibilities to engage in practices of intimacy which would be disapproved of in the community of origin. Escaping from the surveillance of family and neighbours, for example by moving from a village to an urban area can provide the freedom individuals may seek to break with prevailing norms, for example about homosexual practices (Cantú Jr 2009), pre-marital sex, or female household headship. While social approbation of all of these activities is declining in Mexico overall, there are still contexts within which there could be social disapproval or outright antagonism, especially around homosexuality.

Migration may also expose migrants to new practices of intimacy, whether this in be in relation to couple relationships or parenting. These practices may, in turn, be adopted by

migrants, hybridised with existing practices and taken 'back home' in the form of what Peggy Levitt (1998) terms 'social remittances'.

As discussed above, Mexico's boom period for rural-urban migration within the country was in the post-war period. While rural-urban migration is still occurring, what is more common is the engulfing of rural settlements in urban areas as they expand. This has been particularly important since the shift in Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution regarding the potential for communally-held *ejido* land to be passed to individual ownership and sold (Jones and Ward 1998). Urban-urban migration is increasing, particularly to key locations within the country that are seen as economically buoyant (PNUD 2007).

International migration from Mexico to the United States has long been a characteristic of the country's demography. The *bracero* programme formalised a form of seasonal low-skilled migration but since the end of that programme in 1964 migration northwards has continued often in the form of undocumented migration. According to the US Census Bureau as of 2011 there were approximately 11.7 million Mexican-born residents in the USA (US Census Bureau 2011).

Of course, migration is not spatially or socially evenly spread. According to the UNDP the Mexican municipalities with the highest rates of outmigration are those in the middle-income categories. The residents of poorer municipalities do not have the economic or social capital to migrate, while those of richer municipalities have less reason to move (PNUD 2007).

Migration does not inherently create spaces of freedom to experiment with, or be exposed to new forms of intimacy. In some cases practices travel with migrants and are embedded in

their social interactions despite spatial dislocation. This may be because of intra-household relations, surveillance from fellow migrants or diaspora members, or continued transnational links to family and friends in the community of origin (Ariza and D'Aubeterre 2009). Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ernestine Avila (1997) discuss the construction of 'transnational motherhood' through interviews with Mexican and Central American domestic workers in the United States. For many of these women, while they were physically distant from their children, the emotional and material connections remained, but in a different form. Rather than performing a mothering role through intimacy within the home, mothering continued at a distance through sending money and providing advice and emotional support where possible. Technological developments, particularly the internet and cellphones, have made it much easier for contact to be maintained across international borders (Ariza and D'Aubeterre 2009).

Migration may also enable individuals to meet new partners. This could also contribute to the move away from living with, or very near families after marriage (Esteinou 2006). Shifts away from living with or near parents or in-laws on marriage are also facilitated by income received from remittances. For example, Julia Pauli (2008) examines how financial autonomy due to men's remittances from the USA allow women to live away from their mothers-in-law in new-built houses in rural areas. This is often a welcome relief as it allows them to escape what they often perceive as a tense environment with frequent conflict.

### **State Policy**

States play very significant roles in shaping discourses and practices of intimacy. Within Mexico, some attention has been placed on these themes, particularly in recent years with very high-profile debates around abortion and gay rights. Given the federal system in

Mexico, examinations of the state and intimacy need to recognise the different scales at which state policies operate. International institutions, most notably the United Nations, have also played a key role at the supra-national level in shaping national policy.

The separation of church and state in nineteenth century Mexico led to civil, rather than religious, marriage being the only legally recognised form of union. Similarly divorce has been legal in all Mexican states, with some variations, since the Mexican Revolution. This contrasts greatly with many other Latin American countries, such as Brazil and Argentina, where divorce remained illegal until the latter part of the twentieth century. Despite the legality of divorce, divorce rates remain low (see Table 1). Esteinou (2006: 98-9) argues that this reflects social norms regarding cohesion and the role of the family, rather than processes of individualisation. She also identifies however, that there are class and age differences, with divorce more common among younger cohorts and middle classes. In Gutmann's study of masculinity in Santo Domingo, Mexico City, he also examines the low rates of divorce (1996: 141). While he identifies Catholic faith as one reason for attitudes to divorce, many of the other factors link more to the operation of the legal system. The relatively high financial cost of divorce, combined with issues around access to children and custody battles, especially for fathers, and the complexities of land and housing rights in the case of divorce, were all given as reasons by Santo Domingo residents for the low divorce rate. This does not necessarily mean that married couples continue to live together; Gutmann provides a number of examples of couples who have separated, live with other partners, but do not get divorced.

State policies regarding homosexuality are more heterogeneous, reflecting the social and spatial diversity of the country. While homosexual practices are legal in all states and the age of consent is the same as for heterosexuals, many other aspects of intimate life are

constrained by legalisation; most notably marriage and parenting. In November 2006 the Distrito Federal Assembly legalised same-sex civil unions, with the law coming into effect in 2007. Same-sex marriage was became legal in the Distrito Federal in 2010. Gay couples are also allowed to adopt children in the DF. The legal changes in Mexico City followed a prolonged campaign by LGBT campaign groups, which was met by significant opposition by a range of conservative institutions, within which the Catholic Church was a major element (Encarnación 2011). Before the same-sex marriage law came into effect it was challenged in the Supreme Court by other states, but the challenge was rejected. While same-sex civil unions and marriages conducted in Mexico City have to be recognised elsewhere in the country, it is only in Coahuila, Colima and Quintana Roo that same-sex civil union or marriage ceremonies have been explicitly approved through legislation (as of August 2013). However, there are increasing challenges to state policies regarding gay marriage, following a Supreme Court ruling in December 2012 which stated that forbidding same-sex marriage went against federal law of 2001 and 2003 outlawing discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (Justice in Mexico Project 2013).

As Omar Encarnación (2011: 115-6) is careful to point out, despite the rise in legal of gay rights in Mexico and other Latin American countries, attitudes to homosexuality vary greatly. He quotes the 2008 AmericasBarometer survey which found that 30-40% of Mexicans surveyed had a 'high tolerance' of homosexuality; for example they had no problems with openly gay people being able to run for public office. High levels of hostility and lack of tolerance were more likely to be found among people with a religious faith, particularly those from the non-Catholic Christian churches, and those with lower levels of formal education. He also cites the levels of violence against members of the LGBT community, including murders. Thus, while state policies at both federal and individual state level may reflect a

growing inclusion of diverse forms of partnership and family, this does not automatically translate onto more inclusive practices on the street.

A final key element of intimate life into which the state has increasingly interjected is in relation to domestic violence. The focus has been on male violence against women, but domestic violence usually encompasses all forms of physical and psychological violence within the domestic sphere regardless of the individuals involved. The changing forms of intimacy discussed in this volume often involve shifts in power relations within couple relationships. As López and Salles (2006: 390) demonstrate, intimate relations are not just about emotional support and solidarity, but also conflict and antagonism. Violence is a particularly extreme way in which power can be exercised and has frequently been constructed as an inherent part of masculine behaviour and normalised within domestic life. While this has never been as ubiquitous as the one-dimensional constructions of the Mexican *macho* and the self-abnegating Mexican woman suggested (Gutmann, 1996), attitudes to violence against women and within the home have experienced significant changes. Feminist organisations and NGOs have been important in raising these issues (see below) and elements of the media have also been part of presenting alternative ways of living. State responses, to both domestic and international pressures have also contributed to changing attitudes and practices, although there are clearly significant limitations.

Mexico is a signatory to the 1980 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and ratified the Convention in 1981. In 1997 federal law was changed so that physical and psychological violence within the family was explicitly recognised as a crime which could be punished by a jail sentence. Additionally, the law recognised that rape could occur within marriage. These legal changes demonstrated the

willingness of governments to intervene directly in the so-called domestic or private sphere (Torres Falcón 1999). In 2006, the *Ley de Acceso a las Mujeres a una Vida Libre de Violencia* (Law for Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence) came into force. This law specially mentioned indigenous women as an identified vulnerable group (Ortiz-Barneda et al. 2011). Despite legal protection and significant campaigns, domestic violence remains a significant problem in many parts of Mexico. For example, Wright (2005: 282) cites Esther Chávez, then director of the Casa Amiga centre in Ciudad Juarez who claimed that 70% of women in Chihuahua state had been victims of domestic violence. In Mexico City, rape and intimate partner violence was the third most important cause of morbidity and mortality for women at the end of the twentieth century (Ascensio 1999 cited in Garcia-Moreno and Watts 2011: 2).

### **Health and Education Policy**

New forms of intimacy, particularly those considered more individualistic, are influenced not purely by direct interventions in intimate life through state policies on marriage, divorce and homosexuality, but also through education and health policies at both the federal and individual state level. Rosario Esteinou (2006: 83) outlines the importance of expanded school education in the twentieth century (see Table 3), as contributing to new models of intimacy and new opportunities for couple relationships outside the previous formalised rituals of courtship and gendered spatial divisions. The school can be seen as a new agent of socialisation in comparison with parents and the family more broadly (2006: 85). Additionally, more diverse forms of schooling are available, including pre-school institutions and non-Catholic schools.

[INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Secondary school attendance increased significantly in the latter part of the twentieth century as provision improved and qualifications became more important for entry into particular employment sectors. Additionally, in 1993 the Mexican constitution was changed so that secondary education was compulsory, but as Bradley U. Levinson (2001) observes, this change was often symbolic due to the lack of resources at state or household level. While this situation has improved since the early 2000s, with over 85% of 13-15 year olds attending school in 2010 (see Table 3), this still means that nationally about 15% of young people in this age group are not attending school. The figures also do not take into account completion or attainment (Parker and Pederzini 2000). There are also significant regional differences. In the Distrito Federal 92.5% of women and 91.0% of men in the 13-15 age group were enrolled in school in 2010, while the figures for Chiapas were 76.8% and 81.2% respectively (INEGI 2010).

Attendance in post-compulsory education, including universities, has also increased; nationally over 50% of 16-19 year olds were in education in 2010, while the figure for 20-24 year olds was about 20% (see Table 3). Regional differences are particularly striking in the non-compulsory education sector. In 2010 about 65% of 16-19 year olds in the Distrito Federal were in education, but in Michoacán figure was about 40% (INEGI 2010). These differences both reflect and contribute to different transitions to adulthood which Gabriela Mejia Pailles (2012) has identified based on an analysis of the Mexican National Youth Survey ENAJUV) 2000. Looking at the sample of 20-29 year olds, she identified rural-urban differences in leaving education, with young people in urban areas much more likely to combine entry into the labour force with continued education, while in rural areas this was much less common. Limited access to non-compulsory educational opportunities in rural

areas, financial difficulties and social norms (around both paid work and family formation) all contribute to explain this pattern.

The gender gap in education has fallen significantly in Mexico since the 1970s (Parker and Pederzini 2000 and Table 3), however, again there continue to be differences between rural and urban areas. In rural areas young women are more likely to leave school earlier than young men, while in urban areas women's educational enrolment rates are often equal, or even greater than those of men. For example, in the Distrito Federal in 2010 65.6% of women aged 16-19 were in education, whereas for young men the figure was 64.9% (INEGI 2010). In relation to patterns of intimacy, Mejia Pailles (2012: 266) concludes that higher educational attainment among women is associated with later family formation.

Parker and Pederzini (2000: 113) have identified the importance of income in explaining gender differences in school attendance. The conditional cash transfer scheme, Oportunidades (previously Progresa-Oportunidades) seeks to encourage children's school attendance in rural areas, and lower-income urban districts. Cash payments, usually to mothers, are made on condition that children attend health centres and school. There is a sliding payment system with more money given for girls' attendance at secondary school. While there has been significant debate about the way in which women as mothers have been incorporated into this scheme (see, for example, Molyneux 2006), the results in terms of children's health and school attendance have been very positive (Escobar Latapí and González de la Rocha 2008).

The role of educational spaces in changing/ reinforcing patterns of intimacy is very important. They can provide opportunities for young people to meet away from family surveillance and to be exposed to different ideas, both formally through the curriculum, but

also informally through conversations with fellow students. Formal sex education in schools has been on the curriculum since the 1970s, but, as in many countries, sex education in Mexico has tended to focus on biological processes, rather than wider social debates around relationships and emotions (Gutmann 2007: 123-5). Additionally, as with the debates around gay rights (see above), the role of the Catholic church in framing sex education debates has often been important.

Within the sphere of health care, improved access to family planning services has also meant that sexual intimacy between heterosexual couples is less likely to be framed by the risk of pregnancy. Nationally, the total fertility rate (TFR) has decreased dramatically since the 1970s (see Table 4), although this hides the variation from the Distrito Federal (lowest TFR of 1.8) to Chiapas and Guerrero, with the highest TFR of 2.5 in 2009 (INEGI 2013). The desire for smaller families is also driven by women's labour force participation and the opportunity costs (in terms of income, but also ideas of identity and self-worth) of pregnancy and childcare. In 1976 30.2% of women of fertile age were using contraception, but by 2009 the figure was 72.5% (INEGI 2013). As with most social indicators in Mexico, there are significant regional differences; in 2009 79.6% of fertile age women in the Distrito Federal used contraception, compared with 54.9% in Chiapas (INEGI 2013). While free family planning services are provided in state medical facilities, access to and the nature and quality of services available in such facilities, varies greatly. There are also debates about the focus of family planning services on women which fails to recognise the negative implications of excluding men. Excluding men both reinforces a construction of men as irresponsible and unreliable (Gutmann 2007), but it can also leave women unable to negotiate the use of contraception with male partners who are unwilling to entertain the idea.

[INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

The widespread use of contraception among a population which still widely identifies as Catholic (89.3% in 2010, INEGI 2013) is a clear indication of how individuals and couples flexibly interpret religious doctrine within their sphere of intimacy. However, in other sexual and reproductive health debates, the role of the Church has been much more forceful. Debates around the provision of abortion services, for example, demonstrate this very clearly. There are no federal regulations about abortion, but in most Mexican states, abortion is illegal, or is only legally permitted in very specific circumstances, such as when pregnancy is the result of rape. An estimated 500,000 abortions are carried out annually in Mexico (Kulczycki 2007). However access to abortions (either legally or illegally) differs greatly both spatially and socially. Additionally, while emergency contraception was legalised throughout the country in 2004, knowledge of this service, and access to it is also very variable (Sánchez Fuentes, Paine and Elliott-Buettner 2008).

In April 2007, abortion up to twelve weeks of gestation was decriminalised in the Distrito Federal (Sánchez Fuentes, Paine and Elliott-Buettner 2008). Public hospitals in the capital can now provide a termination in early pregnancy for free for women who request one. Sánchez Fuentes et al. (2008) outline how the legal change came about. Key aspects included the role of civil society organisations (see below for a wider discussion of the role of such organisations in changing discourses of intimacy in Mexico) such as the Grupo de Información en Reproducción Elegida (GIRE. Reproductive Choice Information Group) and Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir (Catholics for the Right to Choose). Within political parties, the abortion debate could be used as a tool within wider strategies. As Sánchez Fuentes et al. conclude, 'Though abortion is usually viewed as a politically risky subject for

legislators, in this case, the left-wing party [the PRD] identified it as a pillar of a democratic, secular and progressive society, and used it to define their values in contrast to the right wing' (2008: 356).

### **Social Movements and NGOs**

Outside state institutions, civil society organisations in the form of social movements and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have played an important role in framing discourses around intimacy within Mexico, particularly since the 1960s. As indicated above in the discussion of abortion and gay marriage, civil society organisations come in many forms, including those which seek to maintain what are viewed as 'traditional' morals and behaviours. The massacre at Tlatelolco in 1968 was a key moment in the development of social movements within Mexico, but other events, such as the 1985 Mexico City earthquake (Gutmann 2002) and the murders of women in Ciudad Juarez (see above) have triggered significant mobilisations. The challenge to PRI hegemony represented by the election of Vicente Fox of the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) to the presidency in 2000 provided an opportunity for the opening up of more democratic and inclusive forms of government, but there has been limited progress in this regard.

Adriana Ortiz-Ortega and Mercedes Barquet (2010: 113) argue that, 'it was not until the beginning of the 1970s that women began organizing on their own to discuss the specificities of their social standing as women in Mexican society.' Women had long been involved in campaigns to access community services, particularly in the expanding informal settlements which emerged as Mexico's towns and cities expanded, and women played a significant role in the student movement of the late 1960s, but this mobilisation was around meeting their roles as wives and mothers ('practical gender interests' in Molyneux's 1985 terms), rather than

more strategic action for wider social change in relation to women's rights. The 1970s feminist organisations were largely constituted by educated women from higher socio-economic groups and were based in urban areas, particularly Mexico City. The focus of much of their campaigning was on sexuality and reproductive rights, particularly abortion and access to contraception.

These campaigns remained important in the 1980s, but the devastating effects of the economic crisis and restructuring (see above) resulted in employment and living conditions receiving greater attention. The importance of the grassroots mobilisation of women in rural areas and low-income urban areas around communal services expanded massively and increased the visibility of women in the public sphere (Ortiz-Ortega and Barquet 2010). In some cases women's involvement in such actions were associated with a growing recognition of their wider social position as women in Mexican society, with restricted rights and opportunities (Craske 1994). The diversity of women's mobilisation has continued to the present day, including high profile groups such as the Zapatistas in southern Mexico, where the involvement of indigenous women is noteworthy (Stephen 1995). Groups that explicitly identify as 'feminist' have been crucial in lobbying political parties and government for legal change (see discussion above regarding abortion).

International collaboration has been a key part of aspects of the Mexican feminist and women's movement. Mexican organisations have played an important role in the Latin American and Caribbean feminist *Encuentros* which have been held regularly since 1981 (Sternbach et al. 1992). The 1987 meeting was held in Taxco and in 2009 it was held in Mexico City. These meetings demonstrate the diversity of Latin American feminism and the importance of recognising the development of regionally-specific forms of feminism and

women's activism. While Mexican women's organisations have increasingly linked into international feminist networks, particularly in the USA (see for example the Ciudad Juárez violence against women actions, Staudt 2008), activities and approaches are framed by the specific Mexican context within which the organisations are operating, rather than being a simple translation of 'Western' feminism.

The gay rights movement has experienced an expansion and trajectory similar to that of the feminist movement since the 1970s. While there are numerous debates around terminology, particularly the term 'gay' in a Mexican context (see, for example, Carillo 2003), I am using here as a useful shorthand. In the 1970s organisations such as the Grupo Orgullo Homosexual de Liberación (GOHL) and the Frente Homosexual de Acción Revolucionario (FHAR) were established in major urban centres. GOHL was based in Guadalajara and FHAR in Mexico City (Balderston 1997). The emergence of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s was particularly important in mobilisation around gay rights, with the provision of sexual health services and education linked with a growing awareness of the need to campaign for greater rights for LGBT individuals. Currently organisations such as Letra S continue to campaign in this field and have played significant roles in the legal changes described in earlier sections of this chapter ([www.letrase.org.mx](http://www.letrase.org.mx)).

The first LGBT pride parade took place in 1978 in Mexico City and it now takes place annually attracting thousands. Similar marches and public expressions of collective LGBT identity are now held in many parts of the country. In June 2009 the first 'sexual diversity march' was held in Oaxaca City attracting a few hundred participants who paraded through the city centre on a Saturday afternoon before holding a rally in the central square. While some of the marchers wore masks to hide their identity, most were happy to be seen walking

behind banners and rainbow flags. Oaxaca City with its growing middle class population, large tourist industry and significant university student population, is not indicative of the state as a whole. However, the very public display of diverse forms of sexual identity and demands for equal rights for LGBT individuals, was an obvious indication of how attitudes in one of Mexico's most conservative states have changed. Oaxaca is also one of the states where same-sex marriages have taken place following the Supreme Court ruling in December 2012 (see above).

The rise of NGOs, particularly as service providers, has been an observable trend in many parts of the world since the 1980s, due largely to the adoption of neoliberal policies by governments and international financial agencies (Lewis and Kanji 2009). As the state withdraws provision of services, e.g. health and housing, and private sector providers step in, poorer communities are excluded. NGOs may step in to fill this gap. Additionally, NGOs may operate in places or in sectors where the state was never a significant provider. With regard to services linked to understandings and practices of intimacy, Mexican NGOs have been particularly important in the field of sexual health, with some working in partnership with government organisations (Gómez-Juregui 2004). As well as organisations such as Letra S working in field of sexual rights, other NGOs, such as Salud y Genero, have focused on incorporating heterosexual men into reproductive and sexual health education and support. This recognises the importance of men's roles as partners and fathers in and of itself, as well as the need to engage with men to achieve greater gender equality (Chant and Gutmann 2000).

## **Media and Technology**

The role of media in highlighting aspects of intimate life in Mexico and presenting alternative forms of couple relationship and family relationships is the final main theme I want to address in this chapter. Media can be highly effective in challenging prevailing social and cultural norms, particularly when framed as 'entertainment'. Newspapers and magazines have been important channels through which themes such as women's rights and sexuality have been addressed in Mexico. For example, the feminist magazine, *fem* was included as a supplement to the *Uno Más Uno* newspaper in the early 1990s (Gutmann 1996: 93), and *Letra S* focusing on sexual rights and HIV/AIDS has been a supplement in *La Nacional* and later *La Jornada* ([www.letrase.org.mx](http://www.letrase.org.mx)). However, it is television and film which have been particularly influential in relation to debates about intimacy within Mexico in recent decades. New technologies have also expanded opportunities for accessing information and ways in which relationships can be played out.

While concepts such as 'cultural globalisation' sometimes suggest that countries in Latin America, Asia and Africa are engulfed by Hollywood or US television programmes, within Mexico, and in many parts of Latin America, the long-standing role of the *telenovela* (soap opera) must be recognised (Lopez 1995). Some soap operas were explicitly developed in conjunction with government departments, something which was more feasible during the period of state-owned television channels prior to the privatisation and deregulation of the 1980s. *Acompañame* (Accompany Me/ Come With Me), was broadcast by Televisa in the late 1970s and focused on the reproductive choices of three sisters. This was part of a family planning campaign by CONAPO, the state population council (Soto Laveaga 2007). Soap operas have often engaged with 'controversial' issues to attract attention, and can be a way of presenting alternative forms of intimacy to millions of Mexicans across the country. For example, *Lo Que ed el Amor* aired 2001-2 on TV Azteca. It focused on the lives of upper-

middle-class urban professionals working in finance and dealt with issues such as divorce, homosexuality and infidelity (Pearson 2005).

However, films and television programmes produced outside Latin America also receive a large audience. Within television, the massive expansion in the number of available channels due to deregulation of the television sector means that viewers with satellite connections can access a wide array of programming. Domestic channels also import foreign shows, or produce Mexican versions of international shows such as *Big Brother*.

Unsurprisingly the expansion of cellphones and the internet has provided new spaces and channels for the expression of intimacy and opportunities to explore possible alternative forms of living or being in a couple relationship. In 2010, Mexico had 98.1 fixed and mobile telephone subscribers per 100 people (UNDP 2013: 187), but this varied greatly within the country. In 2011, 77.4% of the population of Baja California Sur used cellphones, while the figure for Guerrero was only 31.1% (INEGI 2012). The figures for internet users are similarly wide-ranging. Nationally in 2010 there were 31.1 internet users per 100 people (UNDP 2013: 187). However, there are significant differences, reflecting what has been termed a 'digital divide'. In gender terms slightly more men (51%) than women (49%) were internet users in 2011 (INEGI 2012) Socio-economic divides are much starker (Mariscal et al. 2011), and this is also seen in geographical differences, with figures for the Distrito Federal standing at 53.6% and the lowest internet use in Chiapas with 22.0%. Internet use is also concentrated in the 12-34 age group, with only 4% of the over 55s using the internet in 2011 (INEGI 2012).

Emailing and the use of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter are among the main reasons Mexicans use the internet (INEGI 2012). This provides potentially new fora

within which to meet potential partners and also to develop new forms of intimacy. It is also potentially part of trends towards a growing sharing and expression of emotions beyond close family and friends, something which 'confessional' forms of television shows have been engaged in for some time.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a brief overview of key recent economic, social and political shifts in Mexico. While these may be seen as part of a homogenising and hegemonic process of modernisation within early twenty-first century global capitalism, the chapter has highlighted social and spatial variations. Additionally, the chapter has highlighted the agency of Mexican individuals and communities in both shaping and resisting certain interventions or influences. However, what is also clear is that dimensions of inequality continue to frame Mexicans' lives, including the choices that they make about their intimate lives.

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**Table 1: Trends in Marital Status, 1950-2010**

	% in each category <sup>a</sup>		
	1950 <sup>b</sup>	1990 <sup>c</sup>	2010 <sup>d</sup>
<b>TOTAL</b>			
Single	27.9	40.6	35.2
Married	47.5	45.8	40.5
Consensual union	11.8	7.3	14.4
Separated	No data	1.2	3.8
Divorced	0.4	0.7	1.4
Widowed	7.3	3.5	4.4
No data	4.8	0.7	0.3
<b>MEN</b>			
Single	29.7	43.4	37.8
Married	50.6	46.1	41.7
Consensual union	12.2	7.2	14.8
Separated	No data	0.6	2.4
Divorced	0.3	0.4	1.1
Widowed	3.6	1.5	2.0
No data	3.4	0.7	0.4
<b>WOMEN</b>			
Single	26.2	37.9	32.7
Married	45.3	45.4	39.4
Consensual union	11.6	7.5	14.1
Separated	No data	1.8	5.0
Divorced	0.6	1.0	1.8
Widowed	10.6	5.7	6.6
No data	5.7	0.7	0.2

<sup>a</sup> Percentages do not always add up to 100% due to rounding up and down

<sup>b</sup> Calculated from data in INEGI *Censos de Población y Vivienda, 1950-1970*

<sup>c</sup> Calculated from data in INEGI *Censos de Población y Vivienda, 1990*

<sup>d</sup> Calculated from data in INEGI *Censos de Población y Vivienda, 2010*

Source: [www.inegi.org.mx](http://www.inegi.org.mx)

**Table 2: Rates of economic activity in the population aged 12 and over by gender, 1970 to 2010**

	<b>% Economically Active (Aged 12 and over)</b>		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
1970	42.6	69.7	17.5
1990	43.0	68.0	19.6
2000	49.3	70.3	29.9
2010	49.2	72.1	32.2

Calculated from data in INEGI *Censos de Población y Vivienda, 1970, 1990, 2000, 2010*

Source: [www.inegi.org.mx](http://www.inegi.org.mx)

**Table 3: School Attendance by Age and Gender Group, 1950-2010**

	% of age group attending school/college/university			
	<b>1950<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>1970<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>1990<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>2010<sup>b</sup></b>
<b>6-12</b>				
Male	38.2	66.1	89.2	96.1
Female	35.4	65.4	88.8	96.4
<b>13-15</b>				
Male	41.0 <sup>*</sup>	57.7	71.7	85.3
Female	33.0 <sup>*</sup>	47.5	67.2	86.4
<b>16-19</b>				
Male	14.5 <sup>**</sup>	27.5	38.1	50.7
Female	9.4 <sup>**</sup>	19.0	36.6	51.7
<b>20-24</b>				
Male	3.6	12.7	17.9	22.8
Female	2.1	6.6	13.8	21.3

Notes:

\* Ages 13-14

\*\* Aged 15-19

Sources:

<sup>a</sup>Calculated from data in INEGI *Censos de Población y Vivienda, 1950*

<sup>b</sup> From table 'Población que asiste a la escuela 5 y mas años segun sexo, 1970 a 2010. At: [www.inegi.org.mx](http://www.inegi.org.mx)

**Table 4: Total fertility rate 1976-2013**

	<b>Mean number of children per woman aged 15-49</b>
1976 <sup>a</sup>	5.7
1990 <sup>b</sup>	3.4
2000 <sup>b</sup>	2.6
2013 <sup>c</sup>	2.2

<sup>a</sup> SPP-IISUNAM Encuesta Mexicana de Fecundidad, 1976 (Mexico DF, 1979)

<sup>b</sup> CONAPO Estimaciones de la población 1990-2010 ([www.conapo.gob.mx](http://www.conapo.gob.mx))

<sup>c</sup> CONAPO Proyecciones de la población 2010-20150 ([www.conapo.gob.mx](http://www.conapo.gob.mx))

Source: INEGI (2013)