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Sexiled in Mexico City: Urban Migrations Motivated by Sexual Orientation

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Migration processes have been studied primarily from an economic or work-related standpoint. We analyse the extent to which sexual orientation becomes a key factor in the decision, made by men who are attracted to other men, to move to Mexico City. A qualitative study was carried out based on in-depth interviews and participant observation. With this data, we analysed: a) the men's motivations and strategies for moving to Mexico City, b) the process of coming out, c) the role of support networks in the city, and d) the perception of their place of origin, having completed the migration process.

Keywords: migration, homophobia, heteronormativity, stigma, coming out, intersectionality

The processes involved in migration towards big cities have traditionally been explained on economic grounds and have been articulated from what is, generally speaking, a heterosexual point of view (Luibhéid, 2004). With few exceptions, sexual issues, and the needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual and Intersexual (LGBTI) people in particular, have been treated secondarily, if at all, in migration studies (Chávez, 2011). However, we need to take into account that, as pointed out by Cantú (2009), sexuality is more than a simple variable: it is a 'dimension of power' that helps to shape the processes of migration.

In this sense, the big city has become the foremost destination for homosexuals from rural areas and smaller cities (Weston, 1995). The big city is where the modern gay identity that we know today has been

shaped (Bech, 1997). That is to say, it is where those forms of consumption, clothing, leisure or relationships that give meaning to what is 'being gay' are manifested. This is not to say that homosexual experiences can only unfold in the big city, since relationships between men obviously occur in rural areas as well; but we would stress that the meaning of what it is to be gay is articulated mainly in the big cities and extends beyond mere sexual practices. The metropolis has fostered the emergence of places to socialise, networks of support and solidarity, increased access to sex and workplaces that are more open to sexual diversity. Undoubtedly, the anonymity afforded by a big city contributes to a sense of freedom for many homosexuals who go there (Bianchi, Reisen, Zea, et al., 2007). Since 1600, cities such as Florence, Venice and Rome also attracted many homosexuals interested in baroque art (Aldrich, 1993). Sydney had come to be known as 'the Sodom of the South Seas' in the 18th Century (Aldrich, 2004: 1720). Paris has built its own gay neighbourhood which has attracted homosexual people from all over Europe (Sibalis, 2004) and other cities, such as New York, Manchester, Newcastle, Toronto, London, San Francisco, Lisbon, Amsterdam, Moscow, or Rio de Janeiro have also become favoured destinations for many homosexuals (Chauncey, 1994; Whittle, 1994; Higgs, 1999).

Although there are, as yet, few official records of the emergence of homosexual life in Mexico City, particularly in the case of sex between women, many new narratives are emerging that are rediscovering sexual diversity in all its unquestionable complexity (Salinas Hernández, 2010; Parrini, 2012; Laguna, 2013; Prieur, 1998). In Mexico City, as in other major cities around the world, countless relationships have been formed allowing a great many men to satisfy their sexual desires with other men while concealing and safeguarding their practices from the social control exerted on non-heterosexual sexuality. In Mexico City many men 'are partially released from social and family constraints and can live with another man as a couple because of the anonymity provided by this city' (Cruz Sierra, 2004: 227). This city has long been considered a place where offenses against morality are given free rein. It has become a refuge for many homosexuals who, as Bautista (2010: 210) puts it 'exercise the city' in order to 'to walk it, survive it, eroticise it, stretch its moral boundaries, saturate it, immerse it in its own tumultuous, crowded broth in order to, in the end, make it

intimate again'. Capistrán (2010) gives an account of the existence of these places of escape that Mexico City had offered its inhabitants since the notorious case of '*The Dance of the 41*' (raid against homosexuality in 1901) and the consequences of being exposed as a homosexual. As Rubin (1984) pointed out, any sexual behaviour that escaped the binary, heterosexual logic would deserve, according to our cultural framework, to be punished.

In Mexico, a whole host of complex social transformations regarding the organisation of gender and sexuality is taking place (Carrillo, 2004). The emergence of movements defending the rights of LGBTI people has led to increased visibility of sexual diversity in recent decades and, in turn, this increased visibility has also been accompanied by a number of legislative changes. In 2003, the Chamber of Deputies approved a Federal Law to prevent and eliminate discrimination. The articles of this law, in which homophobia was listed as one of the possible forms of discrimination, called for the creation of a National Centre for the Prevention of Discrimination to combat all of the various expressions of discrimination. In 2006, the prohibition of discrimination based on sexual preference was incorporated into Article 1 of the Constitution of the United Mexican States. Subsequently, in 2013, the Supreme Court of Justice issued a ruling which argued that homophobic speech constituted a category of discriminatory language and, in some cases, hate speech. Another of the major legislative changes in Mexico concerns the approval of same-sex marriages. Until 2015, only Mexico City, Coahuila and Quintana Roo had legislated in favour of same-sex unions; however, Ruling 43/2015 of the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation set the necessary jurisprudence for regulation in favour of equal marriage across the country.

In Mexico City, it is common to see gay and lesbian couples showing their affection in the central areas of the city, as well as advertising campaigns on urban transport against discrimination of transgender people. However, the development of contemporary gay life in Mexico City is also linked to the general economic transformation of the city. The new mindsets on homosexuality in Mexico benefit from a strong international influence that generates particular forms of consumption linked to capitalist production (Hennessy, 2000). Gay men incorporate practices, subjectivities and ways of speaking that are produced in a

context of transnational interchanges (Boellstorff and Leap, 2004) but, at the same time, they integrate and redefine local notions about sexuality (Vasquez del Aguilar, 2014). It should be remembered that gay identity is the result of capitalist development and migration to big cities after the Second World War (D'Emilio, 1983). This is why Mexico City has a large and growing market for the demands of the homosexual population. The businesses aimed at the gay population in Mexico City have become new focal points for the resulting discourses, practices and representations of minority sexualities. This has contributed to the increased visibility of homosexuality and has generated a range of interrelated cultural meanings that have made it the ideal destination for a large number of homosexuals from all over the country who see the migration process as an opportunity to experience sexuality beyond the social control of their local contexts.

The aim of this paper is to discuss the degree to which Mexico City has become a place of destination for Mexican homosexuals, what it represents for those homosexuals who move there in search of sexual liberation; what strategies are put in place for building support networks in one of the largest cities in the world in order to protect and welcome homosexual newcomers; whether these strategies are operative; how newcomers are initiated into the homosexual subculture of the city; whether their expectations of the migration process are met once they are settled in the city; what the most significant transformations are for those who migrate to the city for reasons of sexual orientation and how these 'sexiles', a term coined by sociologist, Manolo Guzman (1997), depict their places of origin. These are the issues we intend to investigate in order to attempt to understand, in short, the social implications that sexual orientation has in the migration process.

Method

The results presented in this paper were obtained through a qualitative approach to the subject matter. The data we shall analyse was gathered in fieldwork that was carried out during July and August, 2014 and consisted of a total of eleven in-depth interviews in which we attempted to create the appropriate atmosphere and confidence necessary to address highly personal issues with our informants. The interviews were

conducted by one of the authors of the article and lasted for approximately one hour. As with all in-depth interviews, the questions were open and followed on logically from the responses of those interviewed. However, there were certain types of questions common to all of the interviews such as: Why did you decide to come to live in Mexico City? What kind of support do you have here? How are things for gays in your place of origin? We also conducted several sessions of observation in the most popular areas of socialisation among the LGBTI population of the Mexico City, in particular within the *Zona Rosa* (Nightlife district), but also in the Historic Centre. In this regard it should be noted that the areas of socialisation for the LGTBI community also extend to the Internet and, therefore, some of the contacts we established were made through virtual platforms.

The informants were selected on the basis of two main principles: the sexual identity of each participant and their migration experience to Mexico City. However, it should be noted that although a number of women activists who identified as lesbians and transsexuals were also interviewed, the analysis in this article focuses particularly on men who have sex with other men.

Table 1. Participants in the Research and their General Characteristics

Name	Sexual identity.	Age	Origin	Profession
Lucia	Lesbian	36	DF	LGTBI Activist
Marta Amelia	Transsexual feminine	42	DF	LGTBI Activist
Alicia	Lesbian	23	DF	LGTBI Activist
Guillermo	<i>Puto</i>	27	Guanajuato	Cultural Services
Antonio	Gay	27	Guerrero	Teacher
Marcos	Gay	36	Puebla	Editorial Services.
Ricardo	Gay	22	Oaxaca	Intern
Lucas	Gay	45	Tamaulipas	Doctor
Miguel	Gay	53	Nuevo León	Unemployed
Ernesto	<i>Joto/marica</i>	24	Puebla	Student
Alfredo	Gay	23	Estado de México	Architect

Source: authors' own data

Contact was made with informants in one of three different ways: through contact with LGBTBI organisations and groups; through the so-called snowball technique (i.e., via new contacts generated in interviews with informants) and, finally, through social and dating websites aimed at the gay population since they allow immediate one-to-one interaction through their chat or personal message services. In recent years, the Internet has become a key tool for meeting other men with whom sexual interests can be shared or friendships established. The Internet allows users to exchange information and create safe interactions; it is also a source of experience for those who have only recently begun to have sex with other men (Brown, Maycock and Burns, 2005; Fernández-Dávila and Zaragoza, 2009). Dating sites are usually organised on the basis of personal profiles that can facilitate real encounters as well as the exchange of fantasies. For this reason, we decided to create profiles on three dating sites aimed at men who have sex with men: Manhut, Gaydar and Gayromeo.

One of the key elements in attracting participants to someone's profile is the person's photograph. We decided to use a real photograph of our researcher, firstly in order to remain honest and show other users what he really looks like, and secondly to encourage interest in his profile. The profile we created indicated clearly that it concerned a person who was looking to find informants who would cooperate with our study. Our message was: 'Hello! I am conducting research on gay people from all over the Republic of Mexico who are living in Mexico City. If you would like to collaborate, write to me and we can chat'. Through our virtual profile, we could exchange private messages with those who got into contact with us, explain the objectives of the study and, if appropriate, arrange a meeting in person. The internet has quickly become an important new tool for gathering information in our line of research (Smith and Leigh, 1997) which is why so many studies into sex between men have made use of social networking and dating sites to analyse and obtain information on sexual behaviour among gay men (Hillier and Harrison, 2007; Dowsett, Williams, Ventuneac and Carballo-Diéguez, 2008).

It should be noted that, throughout this study, we have followed the guidelines set by the Ethics for researchers (European Commission, 2013), the E Us online research guide on ethical principles for scientific

research. In accordance with these guidelines, this work has been guided by three basic principles: consent, confidentiality and anonymity. Thus, any data that could be used to identify participants in the study has been changed to preserve their right to anonymity but without altering the purpose of the investigation.

Results

Motivation, Strategies and Expectations of Migration

The motives for leaving one's place of origin are usually presented in such a way as to be acceptable to the social network of the person initiating the migration process. However, for relatives, neighbours and friends, motivations arising from a desire for sexual experimentation are not commonly an acceptable justification. This is why we can speak of the motivations for migration that are openly talked about, that are legitimised by questions of access to the labour market, the desire to increase family resources or the need to broaden one's education and training. But there are also hidden motivations which include all those reasons for migrating that need to be kept intimate and secret. In this sense, sexual motivations clearly become one of the elements that must be kept hidden from the home community in order to retain family support. One of the participants in this study stated that:

The idea of leaving the village in order to come and study was only a pretext. First, because Guanajuato is a really Catholic state – one of the most Catholic in the Republic. The last census said that 98 percent of the population of Guanajuato consider themselves Catholic. And so, in a town like mine, it is very narrow-minded. When I came here, I realised I could not go back. It has to do with my personality: I am a real *puta*. In a village where the number of gay men or boys who have sex with men is very small and you know everyone, things are very difficult. (Guillermo)

For the men who have contributed to this investigation, the hidden motivation became something vital and developed into something worth experimenting with, once they had settled in Mexico City. Upon arrival, men who desired other men employed various strategies to satisfy the sexual expectations they had foreseen

in the migration process. However, some of them could not even see themselves desiring other men. In this regard, Ricardo says: 'I feel that, before coming to DF, it did not occur to me that I would need sex or a relationship'. Some participants were aware that it was something latent, but their goal in migrating, at first, was not so they could experiment with new forms of sexual expression, but rather to get away from family pressures. Migration generates certain conflicts with the beliefs and standards that each group considers appropriate (Oehmichen and Barrera, 2000), which is accentuated in the case of sexual migration, requiring each individual to undergo a personal process of relocation to the new social space. In the end, individual notions about sexuality also change with the migration process (Huang and Akhtar, 2005). Therefore, although sexual issues may be present, they do not necessarily become an explicit element in the first stage of migration, but rather, in some cases, a task of acceptance, which is largely carried out through setting up new support networks that introduce men to homosexual circles, providing identity references other than those that are socially sanctioned, and promoting self-acceptance.

The configurations of these support networks can be very different and will depend on the context of arrival, the men's cultural and social resources and the timing of the migration process. For those men who came to the city twenty years ago, as in the case of Lucas, their support network was often built through someone they encountered in a public space:

There was a very important person I met on the subway when I moved to college to enrol as a postgraduate at the university. That person taught me a lot; he showed me what the gay scene was like in the city, the freedom you could have if you wanted it. I got to know the different levels of intensity that there were in homosexual circles, from the boys who liked to go to the movies and feel each other up: or a party, or even people with very intense sexuality who participated in multiple sexual relationships. (Lucas)

However, for those who have arrived more recently, the Internet has been one of the most important channels for meeting other men and setting up a support network that would cover their sexual needs:

I was invited through a chat site (...). In the chat you get to know a lot of people but someone grabs your attention; we talked and had the same interests and concerns. There are lots of people in the chat and when you feel like screwing around, you spend all day looking for *cogidas* (fucks). That was me when I arrived. First one, then another, then another. I love sex.

(Miguel)

On the other hand, for students, the apparent motivation for migrating was educational in nature, in particular, to begin their university studies. However, we can also find hidden reasons that show how important sexuality is in making decisions during the migration process. The university becomes a place where these people can get to know other sexual realities: 'In my course, there were guys who were openly gay; I began to make friends with them and it was with them that I began to get to know the places and codes' (Ernesto). In other words, migration is a complex process in which sexual orientation can be a motivational element that works in parallel with other justifications that enjoy greater social acceptance. Migration is full of expectations, which in some cases are also sexual and this is particularly relevant for homosexuals who move to Mexico City, even for those men who do not accept their own desires and who use migration as a strategy to avoid suspicions about their sexual identity. We can see that *sexile* is a venture with two aims, one of experimentation and the other as a strategy to put an end to family pressures (Sullivan and Jackson, 1999).

The circles in which homosexuals socialise have gone through a number of transformations in tune with the increasing visibility of sexual diversity in the city. Throughout the 1990s, encounters took place mainly in the cover and anonymity offered by the city. Public spaces were places of self-discovery as homosexuals, and where a major part of the gay scene was articulated. At that time, Mexico City already had a number of nightclubs, cinemas and bath houses frequented by the gay men of the time in which they were able, briefly, to hide themselves away and, at the same time, manifest themselves (Schuessler, 2010). In contrast, in recent years, much of the homosexual socialisation also takes place in virtual channels and the commercial circuit. These younger men recognise, however, that the *Zona Rosa* has long been the starting

point for establishing contacts among the gay population. That is, despite the success of the virtual world, there is also the need for a physical space of representation, participation and socialisation for young gays:

I arrived with a little bit of internalised homophobia; the gay bars captured my attention. I went with my friends from university. I was surprised that they were hyper-sexed up spaces, but not with any emotional connection. (...) I think initially, it helps you, but it isn't completely comfortable. It's not like 'Welcome to Zona Rosa!' (Ernesto)

Without doubt, commercial venues for gay socialisation have led to the development of new cultural codes that constitute their own forms of homonormativity, each with their corresponding share of social exclusion (Duggan, 2002). However, at the same time, these spaces are one of the few available places of reference and a point of arrival where gay men can go to feel represented. The commercial areas aimed at the gay population allow newcomers to the city to join a community, one which is sometimes alien and uncomfortable, but one which is at least visible. As Annes and Redlin (2012) point out, the big city allows people to navigate between the visibility as a group while maintaining their invisibility as an individual.

On the other hand, the areas of gay socialisation facilitate the multiplication of the sexual experiences of those who come to Mexico City: 'When I came here, the first thing I did was look for guys and fuck like crazy', says Guillermo. The multiplicity of sexual experiences is experienced by some men as proof that their migration is a success. The migration process needs a success story to enable them to be accountable to themselves, or to their community of origin, but also has certain costs that are sometimes made invisible such as the expression of fear, of being hostage to demonstrating their success or their own authority (Rosas, 2008).

Migrating to Mexico City offers gay men endless possibilities for sexual experimentation. However, they are not free from the fear of rejection or of violence motivated by their sexual orientation. There are common references to possibly violent situations in which homosexuals can find themselves in the city:

At the sexual level, DF does make me a little afraid. I don't think it's the same when they see you like a six-foot *macho cabrio* (bad ass), *mamado* (all muscle) and mean looking, than when

they see me like a skinny little *jotita* (faglet) doing a swanky walk down the street. I mean, I don't think it's the same; sexuality also has something to do with that, with how we feel in certain areas. Take me to Tepito (neighbourhood with bad reputation) and off I go by myself and there you have some jerks hanging out on the street; obviously they're going to call me a faggot and they're going to hit me. If I was heterosexual, my perception of that area would be different. (Ernesto)

Coming Out and Support Networks

Coming out is a complex, ongoing process despite the fact that it is often depicted as a unique and liberating event. The process of coming out is hardly ever complete, since coming out of and returning to the closet are frequent events for all homosexuals (Eribon, 2001). The big city allows people to live openly gay lives in certain social settings, but closeted in others. For many homosexuals, coming out and having their first sexual experience occurs far from their place of origin (Annes and Redlin, 2012). Thus, men who desire other men can access spaces for entertainment and socialising with gays, while work colleagues or family are completely unaware of their sexual preferences. It can be said that we build our identities in a way which is located; that we construct ways of behaving in line with the time, location and types of interpersonal relationships between the participants in particular contexts (Salguero Velázquez, 2013). It is one thing to build one's identity as a child in the heteronormative family environment, or as a worker in the workplace, but it is a different thing altogether to build one's identity as a friend or homosexual partner. This has allowed many men to live an active sex life while maintaining their social respectability thanks to the anonymity offered by the city. However, fear of discovery requires them to be constantly looking for concealment strategies so as to avoid exposing an attribute – homosexuality – which produces such stigma. In addition, men who remain totally closeted, that is, those who have not even divulged their homosexuality to their social and family circle, avoid building relationships that go beyond sex or allow affection to flourish. Thus, sex with men becomes manageable in the big city. However, maintaining a loving

relationship implies greater social exposure and many men shun such exposure until they make a decision to come out.

Coming out can have serious consequences for many homosexuals, which is why they study very carefully how, when and to whom they may eventually explain their sexual preferences. The family is generally the social group with the greatest priority when it comes to confessing any 'deviation'. Thus, some of the men who participated in this research waited until they found a certain economic stability and job security before explaining their sexual preferences to their families, so they could guarantee some form of material subsistence that may be lost in the event of family rejection. In addition, they also waited until they had a support network that could provide emotional help and security in the face of the possible adverse effects of coming out to their families.

For me, getting to Mexico City gave me more security. Like, you see someone who feels really sure of himself, what he does and what he feels and it gives you the strength to go ahead and do it too. At home they knew it, but not everyone, and that enabled me to gradually talk about it without any prejudice. On top of that, the fact I had job security meant that I had the security of being able to talk about it in my place of origin. (Lucas)

Another participant also recognises the importance of meeting other people who have come out, of being able to assess the impact it has had on them and so garner the strength to go ahead and explain his situation to his own family:

Obviously I already knew, but meeting gay guys who were talking openly about these things empowered me (...). In Puebla, I think it's been harder work for my friends than me. And they still find it difficult. Some are still there, and their families are from there, and it has been hard work for them. (Ernesto)

Sometimes, coming out is accidental and unplanned, when, for example, a boy's homosexuality is discovered by his parents. This can occur in many different ways: gay pornography found on a shared home

computer, constant phone calls to a sexual partner, or any other situation that may reveal the homosexual condition. At the end of the day, discovery is a risk that every homosexual knows, fears and strives to prevent in those situations that require it.

On the other hand, coming out also requires recognising oneself as gay. It is necessary to go through a phase of self-identification and acceptance in order to make the decision to explain one's sexual desires; a period of reflection to help gauge the advantages and disadvantages. To this end, the migration process becomes a good intermediary situation in which to take a step back and analyse the situation from a distance. They need to leave behind the internalised sexual norms and cultural values on homosexuality that they learned in their homes (Carrillo and Fontdevila, 2011). In some way, the new context allows them to carry out a prior exercise in self-examination before talking with the family.

Returning to the case of Ernesto, he recognises that he came to Mexico City with a great deal of internalised homophobia five years previously, but now identifies as a *joto* and *puto*, with the idea of politicising his own sexual identity. Guillermo, meanwhile, after recognising himself as gay, posted on Facebook that he had begun a relationship with another man. That is to say, the experience gained in the big city, the anonymity, the migration process and the knowledge of other support networks allows men to draw new identities in which the sexual question becomes visible, thus empowering those who call themselves *gay*, *putos* or *jotos*. Migration, therefore, is not just a move to somewhere else; it is not only about moving away to live in a big city; there is also a transition of the self which allows a new sexual identity to be configured.

However, although sexual orientation is one of the fundamental starting points in constructing one's personal identity, the fact that they happen to be gay cannot isolate these men from other elements in the migration process. Those who migrate to the city, who identify as gay having gone through a process of coming out to themselves, are also sometimes labelled with the characteristics associated with Mexican provincials: 'Me, as well as being a *joto*, I'm a country bumpkin, too', says Guillermo. In the case of lesbians, it is significant that Alicia assures us that provincial lesbians are more brusque and tend to take a

more masculine role, while in the Mexico City lesbians are more diverse. In the following quote we can also see how the question of origin and social class clearly intrudes in the construction of sexual identity:

Here as well, the question of social stratification is very evident. So you can forget the hangouts in Polanco. Those guys are really stuck-up with plenty of cash. Polanco is the rich part of town. It's a really nasty place. I *have* been to Zona Rosa, but I despair at the idea of the pink market. The guys that I like are those who hang out in the historic centre, the jackals. (Guillermo)

For each person, sexual category is joined by other categories such as origin, social class or masculinity that unquestionably play determining roles in the process of coming out, in the social relationships and life courses of men who desire other men. In this sense Heaphy (2011) maintains that gay visibility is designed only for a privileged socio-economic group. However, in addition to factors such as ethnicity, age, race, gender and class in the construction of gay identities, geographical location and territorial context also have a mediating role (Innes, 2004; Knopp and Brown, 2003).

Perceptions of the Place of Origin

The place of origin is perceived by all the participants in this study as a place where social control and supervision is exercised in various ways, inundating both the public and private spheres. Some of them refer to their place of origin using the expression '*Pueblo pequeño, infierno grande*' (Small town, big hell), which reflects how they perceive the towns or villages where they were born and raised. None of the people interviewed in this research considered returning to live in their hometowns to be a possibility within the next few years. Many of them do, however, make weekend visits or return during holidays. All of the participants want to stay in Mexico City because of job opportunities, sexual opportunities and the recognition the city offers to LGBTI people, all of which, they maintain, would be severely limited if they had to go back to where they had grown up. Many of our informants say that returning to their place of origin as gay would mean being dragged into the stereotype of *joto* or *vestida* (transvestite) that has been

constructed regarding men who have sex with men in Mexico. It would force them to adopt an identity they are uncomfortable with or to return to the closet and live in anonymity:

In Guanajuato, they think that if a queer sees a dick he's gonna want to suck it. Just because I'm queer doesn't mean to say that every time I see a dick I'm gonna suck it! In my town the fact you're gay makes you available to any man who wants to fuck you. Then there's the passive role, as if it immediately turns you into a woman. If I wanted to go back and be gay there, I would have to become a transvestite. It's shit having to be a little macho, but I wouldn't be able to take being a trans all day. (...) In Acámbaro there are only two ways to be gay: macho queer who fucks all the effeminate ones or trans. (Guillermo).

Another participant feels proud of his origins, but, given the circumstances considers that he cannot return:

Me, I would like to live abroad. I'd like to go to England. I like London a lot. (...) What I don't want to do is go back to Oaxaca. There are no job opportunities there. I can't imagine going back. And it's not because I don't feel proud of where I'm from; it's because there are two things that I can't do there: work and be who I am. That's why I wouldn't go back. (Ricardo)

The value that the participants in this research give to their place of origin is measured by the representation of sexual diversity there. This is often described as something of a linear relationship as one moves from the provinces to Mexico City, with the provinces being backward and behind the times, while the capital is the symbol of modernity in the country. Rural areas are generally thought of as being the antithesis of sexual liberation. However, this relationship is ambiguous, as sexual issues are not always so static in the provinces and so dynamic in Mexico City. That is to say, in both places, the discourse, practices and representations are constantly transforming. It is true that these transformations do not occur necessarily at the same pace or in the same direction. However, it would be a mistake to think that homosexuality is perceived in the same way today in Puebla, for example, as it was five years ago, when Ernesto migrated. For Gorman-Murray

(2007), this one-way vision generates three problems that need to be addressed. First, it leads to a simplistic and one-sided view in terms of understanding individual movements. Second, it assumes that it is impossible to develop a gay identity in rural areas. And finally, it suggests the existence of a unique identity in urban centres. This divide between the rural and the urban is an added problem, since migrants largely maintain cultural ties with their places of origin which precipitates the traffic of ideas and practices with regard to sexuality (Carrillo, 2004). In this regard, some of our participants point out that, since living in Mexico City, they have also detected changes in their hometowns that have made homosexual reality more visible; some of them have even participated in this transformation. Ernesto explained that, when he lived in Puebla, he did not know any gay people but ‘mysteriously, many of my friends from high school are now also gay’ (Ernesto). He goes on to say that he could now return to Puebla and walk about hand in hand with his partner unbothered by what they said about him. He confesses that he has been called queer, but now ‘I don’t give a damn’.

It is also true, however, that for all the participants in this study, sexual opportunities are much less frequent in their hometowns compared to Mexico City and, in any case, though they believe they could participate in sexual encounters, they would find it very difficult to establish any kind of loving relationship with another man because, as Ricardo says, ‘You can’t fall in love there; everything is pure lust. It’s just sex’. Some participants explained that they had their first sexual experience with men at the very beginning of their time in Mexico City. Antonio, Marcos and Guillermo say they have never had sex in their hometowns. Guillermo explains that now he has become aware of his sexual identity, now that he identifies as queer and his whole family knows his sexual orientation, he still finds it hard to be open about his sexual desires in his hometown because it could jeopardise the welfare of his family. That is, homosexual visibility not only leaves the person who declares himself gay open to judgement; the consequences can also be extended to the family, and it is for this reason that some of the participants in this study return to the closet when they visit their families, precisely to avoid conflicts that their loved ones might have to endure in the local environment. Thus it could be said that migration processes motivated by sexual orientation are not just

an exercise in individual sexual liberation, but are also partly experienced as a mechanism to protect the family:

I do not feel confident enough to express what I really am there. I'm afraid to go and express myself as I would like. Not for myself, but because of the reprisals against my family. I prefer them not to have that discomfort. It makes me sad because I miss my mother, my family, my friends, the food and everything. But I am aware that, if I were there and had the lifestyle I wanted, well, it would be revolutionary in a sense and would involve a great sacrifice. (Guillermo)

Returning to one's place of origin and being openly gay may have consequences not only in the family, emotional and sexual sphere; for some participants, there is also a real risk of assault or extortion.

It's not like here, where you can walk hand in hand with another guy or kiss in public; because there, the police arrive and tell you things, and threaten to arrest you and ask for money. Things like that don't happen here. There's been an advance in rights in recent years, which has resulted in the rest of the country also discussing this issue, but a lot remains to be done in Acapulco. It's changing, it is true; younger people take it more naturally. But it is still very difficult. (Antonio)

Conclusions

This study shows that the phenomenon of migration needs to be considered from multiple dimensions that go beyond the traditional discourse that concentrates solely on economic aspects. Sexual orientation is one of the possible motives that encourage the migration process and therefore should be regarded as one of a number of variables when studying this phenomenon. It is necessary to incorporate the viewpoint of people who are *sexiles* when considering the social management of sex in the city, since it is one of the elements that articulates sex between men in the city.

Migration, to a certain extent, means abandoning the family. This is why these men need to find arguments to legitimise their migration, but among these arguments sexual motivations are unlikely to be accepted by the family. For this reason, men try to find other, more socially acceptable factors that do not create suspicions about their sexual orientation, such as education or working needs, to justify the migration process.

It should be taken into account that in the early stages of the migration process, a social network needs to be set up that allows men to get to know other forms of sexual expression in which they feel they can recognise themselves. The new social network that is constructed during the migration process is critical in generating a new personal management regarding sex. It should be remembered, however, that the configuration of such networks varies greatly depending on the socio-economic context of each individual, as well as the particular moment in time. For example, it is only in the last decade or so that we have had to take into account online life, which has become a new place in which to configure the socio-sexual network for men who migrate to Mexico City.

The big city offers new migrants gay visibility and, at the same time, concealment without the two being contradictory. The anonymity of the big city can enable men to create different social circles that are parallel and unrelated to each other. However, keeping these different circles apart can only be accomplished as long as these relationships with men do not go beyond sex or friendship, and in any case, there is a constant fear of discovery. It is difficult to maintain sex/affective relations while maintaining these two social circles at a distance. Therefore, many of these men give up their sex-affective relationships so as not to compromise their social status, and yet remain sexually active with other men.

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