

Transnational families and state services provision in the communities of origin

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This is a first draft presenting the contents to be developed within the three main sections of the paper:

- 1.- Social Policy as Poverty Alleviation: cash transfer programmes and remittances in Mexico
- 2.- Transnational families as social policy subjects in the communities of origin
3. Cash transfers for educating children and tending for health: transnational families and social policy recipients in rural Nuevo León, México

Further work on contents, references and style of the text will be done for the preparation of the final paper.

Nowadays it is a truism to say that it is not the poorest of the poor who migrate. Nonetheless, a considerable amount of migration takes place from poor areas of the world to rich ones and from underdeveloped regions of a country into more developed ones. Thus, important proportions of migrant flows come from areas that are the object of social policy investment. The latter may be marginalized neighbourhoods in urban settings, rural villages or entire countries receiving UN AID. Interestingly, most of them end up in similar contexts. For example, a Mexican migrant from an impoverished town in the high mountains of Oaxaca, is going to live in a marginalized area of San Diego County in California. The same may be said for a person from Sub-Saharan Africa now living in the outskirts of a European city. Overall, labour migration in general - and particularly south-north migration - is related to the reproduction of the capitalist system, characterized mainly by the relatively unproblematic mobility of elites and the challenge posed by the circulation of manual and service labour. Furthermore, migration of people from poor areas in the south into marginalized areas in the north indicates that some particular migrant flows are conceived as none other than the circulation of poverty (Canterbury, 2010; Faist, 2000, 2005; Glick Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992).

The latter reminds us of an old question regarding the challenges that international or transnational migration poses to individual human rights. Policy is geared towards solving problems within a specific territory rather than covering people's needs. This makes sense when considering place based programmes such as public services, sanitation, reducing environmental risks. But, it is not so obvious when we think about issues directly related to people, such as education, health and work¹. As a result, the international community has reached a consensus about the basic definition of human development as focused on the people::

"The basic purpose of development is to enlarge people's choices. In principle, these choices can be infinite and can change over time. People often value achievements that do not show up at all, or not

¹ The dichotomy between place based and people based policy is blurred. Nonetheless, it is useful to problematize the focus of policy and the challenges it poses for implementation. This discussion was presented in (Cran & Manville, 2008). It was also developed in (Rodarte Valdes, 2010)

immediately, in income or growth figures: greater access to knowledge, better nutrition and health services, more secure livelihoods, security against crime and physical violence, satisfying leisure hours, political and cultural freedoms and sense of participation in community activities. The objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives."

Mahbub ul Haq (1934-1998). Founder of the Human Development Report²

As shown in this definition, education (access to knowledge) and health have been recognized as a priority and basic human capabilities that must be ensured around the globe³. Several destination countries guarantee the access to basic capabilities for children, regardless their legal status, and also for adult residents. There are also many academic and political debates about the right for inclusion that range from the philosophical to the pragmatic. For instance, we should ensure access to health either because it is a universal human right or because we cannot afford to have the hospital wards full of sick migrants who did not get preventive care. Moreover, the plea for inclusion of undocumented migrants into welfare states and access to welfare within countries of destination has been advocated both by governments and civil society organizations alike (Soysal, 1994).

However, when analysing mobile populations, people based rights are rarely fulfilled even in their communities of origin. A Mexican migrant has no more access to education and health in the US as she had in Mexico. Exclusion takes place differently, but still within both sides of the border. As mentioned above, advocates of migrant rights have raised the issue many times with respect to the countries of destination. The same has not happened within the countries of origin, where issues regarding the education and health of mobile populations remain invisible. Migrants within their home communities are like any other citizen, subjects of social rights and development policy. With few notable exceptions (Hamann, Zúñiga, & Sánchez García, 2006; Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública, 2012), the fact that they confront different challenges remains unrecognized. Nonetheless, they have become a source of remittances and in many cases, political leverage abroad. As a result, most development analysis has been done considering the impact of remittances in the local economy. Nonetheless, when focusing on social processes, such as the construction of transnational communities and transnational families, needs for education and health seem detached from the institutions that must provide these services in the communities of origin.

This paper seeks to build on the valuable knowledge about social processes of building community and family through transnational practices in order to problematize what this means in terms of two basic capabilities: education and health, in the communities of origin. More than trying to figure out moral responsibilities regarding social rights, I try to figure out how social policy is operating in places with significant migration rates. Even though it is important to discuss who should provide what and why, this must also be accompanied by an assessment of what is done by whom and how. Thus, the task is on the one hand descriptive, but I also seek to contribute to debates regarding the relationship between individual migrants and other social actors in two main aspects. First, agency is situated as part

² <http://hdr.undp.org/en/humandev/>

³ The operationalization of the idea of capabilities has been the object of intense debate within economics and other social sciences, see for example (Boltvinik, 2003; Desai, 2003; Pritchett, 1997; Sen, 1999, 2003; Townsend, 2003)

of a broader process of social reproduction, by focusing on migrants' relationships with non-migrant family members. Second, by analysing the role of transnational family members as subjects of social policies within their countries of origin. Case studies are presented in the context of the Mexico-US Migration system. Analysis is based on 15 years' experience doing fieldwork in communities of origin in central and southern Mexico as well as recent ethnographic and in depth interviews from fieldwork done in the northern state of Nuevo León.

The first section describes the social policy context within Mexico in order to explain how access to government programs such as public education and health services is crucial to ensure those assets and secure wellbeing both for migrant and non-migrant members of families. Drawing on literature regarding social policy and development, education and health are emphasized as key capabilities within the construction of wellbeing by the state and by the families themselves. The second section presents a literature discussion on transnational phenomena, where relations spanning borders are analysed in the context of familial units. Negotiations between family members include the distribution of economic (stemming from remittances), human (such as formal and informal knowledge) and social (kinship and broader networks) resources.

The third section presents evidence from ethnographic fieldwork and in depth interviews made in the communities of origin in northern State of Nuevo León, during June 2012 - and followed up during the same month in 2013. Narratives of migration and the construction of family are presented for different profiles within transnational families and within beneficiaries of a conditional cash transfers program for education and health (*Oportunidades*). Profiles of migrant families include nuclear and extended families with members living in Mexico and the US as well as nuclear families who have recently returned. Families in *Oportunidades* include units with parents under 30 and children in primary school, older couples with children in secondary, as well as families with contrasting sense of wellbeing according to their perceived success in educating their children and attending health needs. In the conclusions, the paper argues that viewing migrants in their relationship with other social institutions, such as the family and the state, will help to understand specific contexts within countries of origin which may either perpetuate or hinder migrant networks. Finally, a reflection is presented regarding the possibility of considering transnational policies for mobile populations.

1.- Social Policy as Poverty Alleviation: cash transfer programmes and remittances in Mexico

As most other countries in the world, under the neoliberal model, Mexico has undergone extensive budget restrictions towards welfare state institutions. These have led to increased inequalities and exclusion (Babb, 2005; Huber, 2003; Portes & Hoffman, 2003; Walton, 2004). Nonetheless, it is worth pointing out that social exclusion was also a problem of the old welfare regime. Institutions built to provide public services, such as education, health and housing, were built and expanded during the period from the 1930s to the 1960s. These were based on a corporate pact between the hegemonic party in power, unions and rural organizations, which in general promoted industrialization in urban areas. Economic and political limitations of the model resulted in 50% of the population lacking access to either one of these

services (Ordoñez Barba, 2002, p. 50). As a result, when adjustment policies were implemented during the 1980s, they added population to an already existing marginalized sector (Pastor & Wise, 2003).

On the other hand, the discourse on workers' rights and welfare was changed into one of poverty alleviation, accompanied by a shift from universal social policies into focalized ones. It is important to note that this has generated a huge debate on focalization versus universalization. Is it really worth to create focalizing programmes when 50% of the population is lacking at least one basic social service? The debate is beyond the scope of this paper (Gabarrot Arenas, 2013). However, it is worth noting since the attempt to focalize has derived in a pulverization of social policy. For instance, the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Policy (*Consejo Nacional para la Evaluación de la Política Social*, CONEVAL), documents 179 different federal poverty alleviation programmes, within the ministries of Agriculture, Education, Health and Social Development. Even though program design is an intrinsic part of policy implementation, all these programmes have roughly the same target population and the same goals-to provide access to basic public services. In words of the CONEVAL, there is a:

“dispersion of resources in diverse programmes, ministries and institutions, which means an atomization of spending which may translate in a lack of effectiveness and efficiency... the problem is aggravated since in each government or legislature, there is an incentive to create new programmes, which derive in a tendency for these problems to increase systematically”

(Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social, 2008b, p. 77-78).

The most publicized and politically profitable programmes are concentrated within the Social Development Ministry (created in 1992). Most of them consist of cash transfers, of which the insignia one is *Oportunidades*. According to its guidelines, *Oportunidades* is geared towards reducing food poverty and capabilities poverty through conditional cash transfers given to women for spending in their households. For example, a mother may revive scholarships for her children from third grade until high school, which range from 140 (approx. 11 dollars) to 895 pesos (approx. 70 dollars), amounts increase with school level. In exchange, women must attend to talks on health and submit themselves and their children to regular medical and nutritional check-ups. The whole family must comply with school children's assistance to school and clinic, which is proven to programme officials through the national health card. Finally, women participate in committees of community promotion, ensuring the well-functioning of the programme. The latter include a vocal for education, health, nutrition and surveillance of programme rules. *Oportunidades* is a widely implemented programme, covering most rural Mexico and some significant sectors within urban areas⁴.

Moreover, program evaluations have reflected positive effects of cash transfers on education and health of beneficiary households (Campos Bolaño, 2010) while two aspects remained questioned. First, the fact that *Oportunidades* makes families dependent on government money transfers, thus most of them continue in the programme until their children graduate from high school rather than actually overcoming poverty conditions. The latter is due to a lack of job opportunities for *Oportunidades* graduates as well as structural conditions in the regions it operates. Second, the quality of education and health services has not been improved, thus the programme is sending children to school and people to clinics which are not

⁴ Other cash transfer programmes within the same ministry distribute money for buying food for children younger than five years, promoting home improvement projects and starting small businesses.

prepared to give them proper services (Levy, 2010). Thus, cash transfers have been compared to a Band-Aid used to stop a big haemorrhage.

These debates resonate with discussions regarding the positive or negative effects of remittances in development that have long been concerned with the fact that communities may become dependent on remittances, generating a migrant syndrome (Alarcón, 1992; Massey & Parrado, 1998; Reichert, 1981, 1982). Also, the lack of an appropriate environment for remittances to generate productive investment and employment has been addressed (Taylor, 1999). Finally, in Mexico, since 1992 Durand and Massey noted that an important part of remittances is invested in education and health within poor areas, and they noted that remittances are a form of cash reaching directly to people who need it:

“migradollars flow directly to people who need them the most, without being filtered through intervening social and economic structures. Little of the funds are siphoned off by higher-income workers occupying positions of authority in intervening structures, and virtually all the money goes to the poorest segments of Mexican society.”

(Durand, Parrado, & Massey, 1996, p 440)

Although there is no quantitative study showing how many *Oportunidades* beneficiaries are migrant families, communities of origin are *Oportunidades*' territory. In fact, it has been argued that *Oportunidades*, by requesting families to be present in school and clinic, may help to anchor otherwise potential migrants⁵. Meaning their family members share the same clinics and schools.

The latter helps link debates on migration and development through a very concrete piece of empirical evidence. Both *Oportunidades* and Remittances are cash transfers spent mainly in sustaining family social reproduction. Most of this money goes to buying food, clothes and school supplies for children, as well as medicine and care for all members within households (Campos Bolaño, 2010; Cohen, 2001; Conway & Cohen, 1998; Durand et al., 1996; Kanaiapuni & Donnato, 1999; Martínez Martínez & Cogco Calderón, 2010; Stark & Lucas, 1988; Stark, Taylor, & Yitzhaki, 1986; Taylor, 1999). Furthermore, in both cases, cash transfers are considered to have negative effects in the long run, related to dependency. For *Oportunidades*, experts have urged the government either to complement the programme by implementing employment opportunities, or to reconsider the strategy altogether and focus on universalizing social policy (Cordera Campos, 2007; Martínez Assad & Ziccardi, 2000; Palacios Escobar, 2007; Rodríguez Medellín, 2007).

Regarding migration, the government has made a specific effort to channel remittances into productive investment through the 3x1 programme, which interestingly is based also in SEDESOL. The latter contemplates that for each dollar spend by a hometown Mexican association from the US, the federal, state and municipal government will spend another dollar, thus promoting infrastructure building in the communities of origin. Perhaps the problem is elsewhere. As it has been pointed out, the quality of education and health within these areas are very limited, so are job opportunities. Thus, the efforts

⁵ My own ethnographic fieldwork, both in Oaxaca during 2000, 2005 and 2006 and in Nuevo León during 2012 and 2013 points to the fact that if migrants are not beneficiaries, they are neighbors of *Oportunidades* subjects.

made both by government and migrants in order to increase cash availability for these matters is met with a wall because they can only spend it in poor education and poor health services.

For instance, in Oaxaca, during 2000, a hometown association from the municipality of Diaz Ordaz bought a used ambulance from a US hospital and brought it back to Mexico⁶. However, the use of the ambulance varies according to local context. Furthermore, the federal government funds most clinics in rural municipalities and their budgets do not include the operation of the ambulance. Since the agreement to buy the vehicle was made through the municipal authority the clinic –dependent on the federal government – was not able to supply paramedics. Moreover, the ambulance was often used to move patients either from an isolated community to a rural hospital or from there to a metropolitan clinic. This it entailed high expense from users (approx. 153dls, or more, depending on distance), thus the ambulance was rarely used. I found the same story for a Rotary Club donated ambulance in Dr. Arroyo, Nuevo León, in 2012. Although evidence is anecdotal, it clearly illustrates how development problems such as the provision of health are obviously common for migrant families and non-migrant ones within the communities of origin. Individual migrants may be able to use remittances to pay for the ambulance, but the place they live in presents challenges for them given poverty conditions. Considering other ways for them to use remittances that may entail the provision of social rights could be an interesting solution to explore.

If people indeed succeed they will in the end have access to poor jobs. When put in these terms, the opportunities for development are grim. Nonetheless it could be worth considering that cash transfers may be accompanied by an effort to improve education and health services, while remittances may be geared towards these same areas. Why not think about giving migrants the opportunity to invest in children's scholarships and in buying medicines? However, thinking only about remittances is limited. When a migrant family has a specific need regarding education or health, the whole group mobilizes to cover it. This is not new, migration as a family strategy has been well documented within studies on migration and transnational approaches have shown how families become trans-border units with many challenges. The following section considers the definition and functioning of transnational families and how they present a challenge for social policy.

2.- Transnational families as social policy subjects in the communities of origin

Overall, contemporary work on families has agreed that they are relational units which must be analysed considering both varying power relationships and limits. Thus, the definition of family is an empirical question. However, this poses important analytical issues, for instance how to determine the boundaries of family units. For instance, the notion of a nuclear, heterosexual family, sharing a common house and which main function is to take care of children has clearly been shown to be a western notion of social values more than a common societal form (Leeder, 2004; Ribbens McCarthy & Edwards, 2011).

Nuclear families are then a part of a wider configuration of living arrangements such as extended families that include parents and siblings. The latter poses a methodological limit. When the focus is quantitative,

⁶ Information regarding the ambulance was documented in (Gabarrot Arenas, 2004).

then the family unit must be generally defined a priori, that is why most quantitative approaches still privilege the notion of household. A useful alternative has been the idea of household, as co-residence of people – often related through consanguinity -, sharing a common budget. Nonetheless the idea of family nearly always transcends the idea of home (Esteinou, 2008; Hareven, 1971, 1974; Leeder, 2004; Ribbens McCarthy & Edwards, 2011). In other words, the limits of the family unit are not the limits of the household but the limits of its relations. Thus, the family becomes a social field with its own rules of the game and its own borders, which are determined by its members. The definition of each unit is always empirical and through an inductive exercise. This opens up the possibility to understand power struggles, as feminists have well documented, and it also shows how it is the space where some social inequalities, such as gender, are constructed and reconstructed.

However, within qualitative studies, an inductive approach allows for the understanding of complexity and to the possibility to compare family structure. For instance we can compare transnational families to other types of families. As a result, the idea of co residence must be necessarily abandoned because it anchors the family in one specific territory. A useful option is to build on the relational approaches and define the nuclear family as the one in which interaction is more frequent and intimate whereas the extended family is more distant. Using Granovetter now classic distinction between strong ties and weak ties (Granovetter, 1973, 1985). In this way, bonds are part of daily lives and are constructed and reconstructed through social practices, as structuration theory and Bourdieu's notion of habitus have pointed out (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986, 1996; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Giddens, 1984; Jenkins, 2002; Nedelcu, 2012). Thus, family is not a static definition, but a process, as the term “doing family” often used within family studies indicates. As such, responsibilities regarding social reproduction, work, inheritance are distributed inter generationally and between men and women. For example, a child's grandparent living in the same neighbourhood who rarely sees her grandchildren will be in the extended family circle, whereas a grandparent living farther away within a city but who takes care of the grandchildren daily when their parents go to work, will be within the nuclear family circle. In this continuum, several relationships may fit it, such as a grandparent living in another country taking care of grandchildren during the summers. It is in the nuclear area where daily rituals of life such as sending children to school, feeding and bathing them, generally takes place. These entail the administration of material assets such as food, clothing and general spending. The problem of how to shed light in these micro social interaction is a challenging one, especially when families include long distance relationships within their organization (Bacigalupe & Camara, 2012; Carling, 2008; Carling, Menjívar, & Schmalzbauer, 2012; Falicov, 2007; Mazzucato & Schans, 2008; Zentgraf & Stoltz Chinchilla, 2012). For instance, a mother calling their children every day or a child calling her elderly parents every week and traveling home to take care of them when they get ill. The trip may be from the US to Mexico or from one neighbouring community to another.

For this type of research the idea of a family strategy has been useful. This concept was firstly introduced to understand peasant families but has been widely used within the analysis of poverty. A family strategy is understood as a social process where a portfolio of activities and assets is built through which the unit ensures social reproduction (Moser, 1998). A more precise definition will be those strategies which entail “income, both cash and other economic assets, as well as the institutions (kinship, family, neighbourhood, town), gender relationships and property rights that are required to sustain a given living standard. Social networks are important to sustain the portfolios... but it also includes assets derived from public and social services provided by the State, such as education, health, roads, water,

etc.” (Ellis, 1998, p.4). This notion of the family as an economic unit is far from new (Durkheim, 1964). Nonetheless, it has proven useful for social scientists up until today. In particular, families in the global south retain this function, whereas in other contexts it has taken a role more related to emotional support (Leeder, 2004)

It is worth mentioning that transnational family formations are one aspect of transnationalism (Boehm, 2012; Dreby, 2010), many others have been documented for Mexico. For instance, transnational communities, have shown to expand their social fields within two clear poles in the US and Mexico, such as Ticuani Puebla and New York, or the mixtec villages in what Michael Kearney has termed Oaxacalifornia (Michael Kearney, 1996; M. Kearney, 2000; Michael Kearney & Besserer, 2004; Smith, 1998a, 1998b, 2003). Furthermore, migrant hometown associations point to distinct degrees of institutionalization of relationships between migrants and their communities of origin (Moctezuma Longoria, 2005). In all cases, the issue is to consider space as socially constructed, an idea which has been well established within Human Geography (D. Massey, 1994, 1995; D. B. Massey, 1994, 1995). When considering migration, this conception of space opens up interesting possibilities to understand cross border interactions (Ojeda, 2005). In this sense, it is important to consider that transnational phenomena are not limited to migrants, with new information technologies and time-space compression, many social aspects, such as the economic and financial system or the media, have been transnationalized. The latter is also stating the obvious within migration experts. Nonetheless it is worth remembering since it has an important impact for the study of the communities of origin. Most people’s daily lives have a transnational aspect one way or the other. For instance, cable television, e-mails and virtual communities –such as Facebook- are available in poor rural areas. Furthermore, in the case of Nuevo León and other non-border states a new investment programme for the south entails the establishment of maquiladoras (Gasca Zamora, 2002) .

Thus, migrants’ practices are not isolated, on the contrary, as mentioned before, they are immerse in wider phenomena related to the redistribution of information and the circulation of capital. However, daily lives analyses are still needed to understand migration. In other words, transnational communities and migrant organizations are evident cases of collective transnationalism. In contrast, day to day activities of people living symbolically in two places constructs wider transnational phenomena (Glick Schiller et al., 1992). For understanding development, daily lives may be the scope to understand not only the social dynamics of development policy but also the complexity of migrants who are subject of this policy. It is well known that the most sophisticated institutional design may fail in the day-to-day operation of a programme. Nonetheless, there is little attention paid to the day-to-day lives of common folk who are subject of these programs. In particular, these subjects may have more or less degrees of transnational living, meaning they construct themselves as different individuals *vis a vis* the state. Thus, individual experience should be as relevant as collective experience to understand transnational phenomena. The family becomes then an important point of departure, since individuals rarely live alone or just with friends.

Moreover, even though families may be divided between two different development contexts, their daily lives may have one thing in common. Struggling to sustain social reproduction by facing poor schools and exclusion of the health system. Thus, ensuring access to these two basic social rights is a challenge no matter where they live. Either because they face discrimination and a lack of documents ensuring access in the countries of destination or because the limited infrastructure in the communities of

origin. Studying migrant families per se has shed light into their dynamics and needs but we still have to understand how they fare when considering the material and symbolic aspects of reproduction on a daily basis. Including the notion of transnational families in the study of social policy may shed a light on these needs. Additionally, when considering the impacts of migration, daily lives allow us to transcend the idea that it has dichotomic effects on development (either positive or negative) into a more flexible notion of different impacts at the macro, meso and micro level. In other words, impacts take place not only in destination and origin territories, but also in the bridges built by interactions through visits, phone calls and e-mails. Thus trying to anchor abstract debates on rights into concrete problem-solving strategies of people which take place every day the children go to school or one family member becomes ill. The next section presents some results of how such a research may be done using qualitative methods within the communities of origin.

3. Cash transfers for educating children and tending for health: transnational families and social policy recipients in rural Nuevo León, México

The evidence presented in this section is drawn from three different sources. First, ethnographic fieldwork which includes recent observation in a rural municipio of the state of Nuevo León, which took place during the months of June 2012 and June 2013. Second, in depth interviews with 14 migrant families and 14 *Oportunidades* beneficiary families conducted in this period. Third, I have compared my case studies, both the municipality and the families chosen, with other case studies within the literature on migration and the literature on development. It is worth mentioning that this research advocates a longitudinal view of development, thus it is also informed by my own experience of interviewing and interacting with individual migrants and their families, first with deportees at the US eastern border (1994), second visiting migrant communities in San Luis Potosí (1999), then doing participant ethnographic fieldwork (2001) and filming two video case studies (2006 and 2007) in the same region. More detailed information on the municipal case study and the families is given in the following paragraphs.

Mexico has a very diverse territory, both in terms of physical geography and regional social configurations. Popular sayings always refer to the “many Mexicos” or at least the three Mexicos: the north, the center and the south. Academics approach regionalization in various ways which roughly coincide with the widespread triple division. Federal government is organized along 31 states, 1 federal district (the capital, Mexico City) and 2,456 municipalities. The range of municipalities a state may have goes from 570 in Oaxaca to 5 in Baja California Sur. Furthermore, most indicators vary widely from one municipality to another, even neighboring municipalities. Thus, high development municipalities are neighbors with very low development ones, indigenous with non-indigenous, and so on. In terms of capabilities poverty and migration, the percentages also vary. However, as shown half of the municipalities have between 20 and 40% of their population living in capabilities poverty and half have wither low or medium migration to the US (Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social, 2008a). In these terms, Dr. Arroyo has a profile that invites comparison with all of them, having

35% and a Medium migration intensity index⁷. Furthermore, although there is no quantitative data on the specific issue of migration, ethnographic fieldwork and literature about migration in the state suggests that it has a long tradition. Families started migrating since the bracero time (1940s) and an important share is documented. Also, as is the case of other northern municipalities, there is a high degree of mobility or circular migration to the US (Hernández-León, 2006, 2008; Hernández Laos, 2000; Ramos, 2009; Sandoval, 2012; Zuñiga, 2011; Zuñiga & Reyes, 1988, 2006). As a result, the case study contributes to the body of work on the north of Mexico (particularly the northeast) and it is a good contrast to other documented experiences in the central and southern regions.

Ethnographic fieldwork entailed two interviewing strategies. For migrants, a key informant family was contacted through my university network. A research student who collaborated who graduated from a major in Biology at the University of Nuevo León in Monterrey belongs to a migrant extended family from Dr. Arroyo. Given the relevance of kin networks and the importance of community, she was able to both indicate families in a similar situation to hers and help me generate rapport. As a result, a total of 26 families were visited of which 14 were interviewed in 2012. During 2013, 11 of the original sample families were located and a follow up in depth interview was conducted.

The most common pattern of migration matched the profile built from literature review for the region: highly mobile extended families. However, two other profiles were found to be relevant. First, nuclear families whose head engages in circular migration, both documented and undocumented. Second, a relatively new type of family which has emerged since the financial crisis and increased US deportations in 2008, split families. One profile entails an undocumented mother whose husband and children stay or are able to circulate in the US. The other profile includes returned migration of whole families, due to lack of jobs or deportation of the father. I constructed the narratives related to the history of migration and family for each of the profiles. These different profiles may in turn be compared to other profiles within the transnational families literature.

The second interviewing strategy was related to the *Oportunidades* programme. The selection process of *Oportunidades* is made through the application of a community census. A survey is applied by personnel from the Ministry of Social Development and all heads of household are asked about family assets, including housing conditions, income, and electro domestic appliances. Contacting ministry personnel is always a difficult bureaucratic process, in part due to high political controversies regarding the programme being used with clientelistic purposes by different parties. Furthermore, experience from other fieldsites (in Oaxaca and Nuevo León) indicated that interviewees are under a lot of pressure to give the “correct answers” in order to be chosen by the programme (for instance denying the possession of

⁷ The migration intensity index combines four components based on the proportion of households at the municipal and state level which in the last five years have: 1) received remittances 2) have a migrant member in the US 3) have a migrant member which travels to the US frequently 4) have a returned migrant member. Statistical analysis is used to combine these four components in a correlation matrix and then rank them in five intervals: Very Low (-1.2, .88); Low (.88,.49); Medium (.49-.27); High (.2, 1.04) and Very High (1.04, 2.5). Details as to the Statistical methods used to generate the index are available on the internet: (Consejo Nacional de Población, 2010). Consejo Nacional de Población. — In. www.conapo.gob.mx.

some assets such as TV or remittances). On the other hand, Dr. Arroyo was affected by killings and extortions giving the recent context of violence in Mexico and particularly in Nuevo León. Thus a middle ground was found when I met a local official working as the representative for health issues in one of the clinics of the municipio (organizing health talks and family check ups), who became my key informant. As a result, I was not introduced to families through an Oportunidades official, but was able to generate rapport since they knew Don Ignacio very well (all names have been changed).

I met with more than 50 female family heads during 2012, most of them at the health talks where I was allowed to stand in, of which 15 were interviewed in their houses. Nonetheless, given the context, I was only able to secure follow up information in 4 cases. These four families were visited again in 2013. It is worth mentioning that by 2013 violence had diminished in the municipality, people were less weary of giving contact information, including Don Ignacio who was still there. As a result, follow up details for another four families were obtained who will be visited next year. Oportunidades focalization strategy means that the profile of families is very explicit. However, there is a difference between families who are younger, meaning parents are between 25 and 30 years with children in primary school and families who have parents over 40 and children in secondary school. Also, some families express a higher sense of wellbeing than others. Narratives were constructed for these four profiles: young and middle aged households, less and more sense of well being. The functioning of Oportunidades at the municipal level may be contrasted with a broad body of literature on the programme, including its official evaluations and with research done on social policy in general.

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