

# I. CONSTRUCTING HOME BY SECOND GENERATION MIGRANTS

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## CHILDREN OF SÁNCHEZ 50 YEARS LATER: AGENCY OF TRANSNATIONAL CHILDREN

### PREFACE

In the title of this article I refer to Oscar Lewis' classic book. I use the figure of "children of Sánchez" as a symbol of Mexican vulnerable groups. This category is diverse and is constituted of people of all ages, children and youths among them. In the second half of the twentieth century (im)migration to the U.S. became a popular strategy to overcome the poverty among many Mexicans. Although most of the migrants have been adults, it is hard to underestimate the role of children in the transnational mobility. They are both a reason for their significant others to migrate and they are migrants themselves. Parents decide to emigrate to improve life opportunities of their offspring (Dreby 2010: x, 2). Moreover, children often cross the borders of nation-states with or without their parents. However, migratory studies have overlooked children's perspective for a long time. Only recently this tendency has started to change, and migratory studies are becoming less "adultist" (Tyrrell 2011: 23).

The objective of this article is to examine the agency of transnational Mexican children and to identify what influences it. By agency I understand the ability to decide independently and to be included in decision-making process. I start from the premise (see: Boehm et al. 2011: 7) that migratory studies have

overemphasized push and pull factors for decades and have underestimated actor's subjectivity (e.g. Lee 1966). To make social studies less reductionist, we need to adopt the viewpoint of our interview partners and expound their agency. A turn from structural factors to transnational actors and their agency does not place us in the branch of microsociology, though. Structural factors determine the agency of individuals. Therefore expounding of the individuals' agency will explain how social structure inter-twines with lives of transnational individuals. Transnational actors are subject to the U.S. and Mexican migratory policies. The analysis will show the interdependence of the individuals and nation-states' policies.

Family members, especially caregivers play an important role in both increasing and circumscribing children's agency. Therefore, the study must involve families and their experiences. For children – especially the youngest – family is the most important reference. I adapt “children-in-families approach” (Tyrell 2011: 27) and I put the experience and perspective of children and youth front and center. Although I have opted for case analysis, I believe that the cases I present below indicate certain tendencies.

I am particularly interested in case of migrants from La Mixteca, a region situated in the East of Oaxaca, in the South of Mexico. Intensive migratory flows from La Mixteca started in the mid-twentieth century and led to the emergence of transnational communities. By this term are understood prime communities localized in Oaxaca and daughter communities, situated in the central and northeast of Mexico and in various municipalities in the U.S. (Kearney 2006: 53). According to Michael Kearney, transnational communities form a third space, above the borders of nation-states (*ibid.*). Families move between localities. Second-generation children belong to transnational communities, hence – like their parents – they treat the prime community as reference point (Besserer, Kearney 2006: 12). The inclusion of the community and families, which constitute the meso-level of the analysis, should prevent us from methodological nationalism (Wimmer, Glick-Schiller 2002).

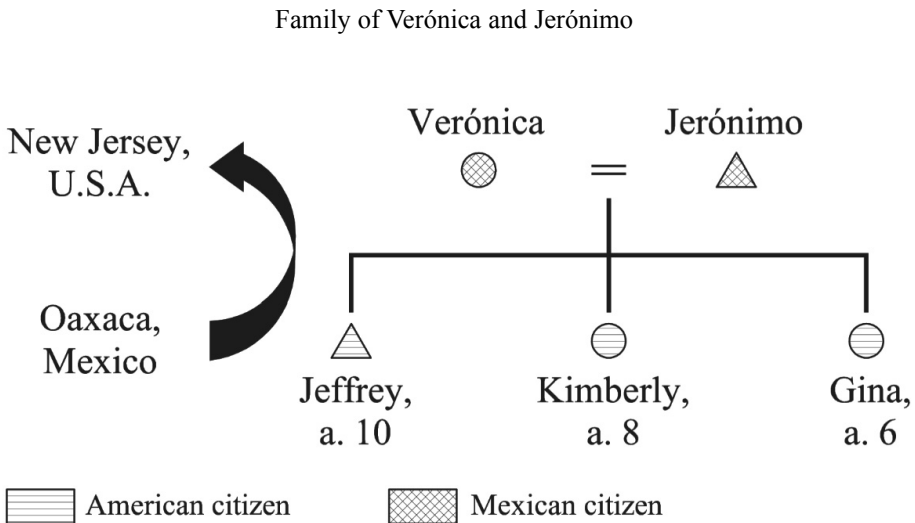
I have worked in a transnational community that originates from a *pueblo* (rural municipality) San Ángel. It is situated in area of La Mixteca called Mixteca Baja. International migration from San Ángel was initially dominated by men. American labor market and the U.S. migratory policy (e.g. Bracero Plan) favored them (Boehm 2012: 15). Children's and female's immigration started with the U.S. migratory regulations aimed at family reunification (Verea 2003: 84–85). Two important bills let immigrants regulate their status: Immigration and Nationality Act (1965) and Immigration Reform and Control Act (1986) (Massey et al. 2009: 58). However, the majority of people from San Ángel crossed the U.S. border after the aforementioned regulations had already been introduced. Some of them did it accompanied by their children.

I am also concerned with the agency of the U.S.-born children of Mexican (im)migrants. According to *ius soli* they are American citizens. For the second-generation children, *migration is already an internal part of their personhood* (Boehm 2012: 120). Many of them auto-define themselves as “Mexican-American”. The reasons why the children come to *pueblo* vary. They also have different levels of agency.

In 2012 I received Mexican Government Scholarship for Foreign Researchers, which enabled my fieldwork in Oaxaca. I worked in San Ángel among children and adults. In *pueblo* I carried out extensive participant observation. Interviews with children and their caregivers contributed valuable data as well. To protect migrants from the community who are unauthorized in the U.S., I use pseudonyms for the *pueblo* and my interview partners. I would like to thank them for sharing with me their testimonies. I would also like to express my gratitude to my Mexican advisor, professor Federico Besserer for his valuable guidelines and to Lilia Solis Arellano for having introduced me to the community of San Ángel.

CHILDREN OF VERÓNICA AND JERÓNIMO: U.S. CITIZENSHIP AS A MEANS TO REGULATE PARENT’S MIGRATORY STATUS

Figure 1.



Jerónimo and Verónica were born in San Ángel. As adults they decided to migrate to the United States to improve their living conditions. Their children were born in America. Jeffrey is 10 years old, Kimberly is 8 and Gina is 6. By August they all will have gone to primary school, as Gina is entering the first grade.

U.S.-born children of migrants automatically obtain dual citizenship (Passel, Cohn, Gonzalez-Barrera 2012: 15). It is a migration policy tool that mitigates the second generation's loyalties toward two states: the one where they were born and the country of their parent's origin (Portes 2007: 658). Verónica's and Jerónimo's migratory status is still irregular, as they had gone to the U.S. *como mojudos* [without state authorization]. Although they have passed several years there, they have been unable to put in order their documentation. According to available estimations, one third of all families of immigrants are of mixed legal status in the U.S.A. (Capps, Fortuny 2006) and there are over 3 million U.S.-born children in families headed by undocumented migrants (Passel 2005: 3). A great part of them are Mexicans. The U.S. population of "unauthorized" Mexican immigrants was estimated to be of 6,1 million in 2011 (Passel, Cohn, Gonzalez-Barrera 2012: 7).

Verónica and Jerónimo, aware of their "illegality" and deportability decide not to leave the U.S. Should they visit their parents in San Ángel, they would face dangerous border crossing on their way back to the U.S. They fear being caught by a border patrol or being hijacked by drug traffickers. Their children, however, can cross the border, as they are holders of the U.S. passports. In 2012 they came to San Ángel for the first time to spend their summer holiday with the part of the family they had not known before. Their grandmother Gloria, whom I had known for a couple of months, told me before their arrival: "I am going to have little Americans at home. If you want, you can come and talk to them". One evening I came to her home. Three siblings were playing with their cousins whom they had met only a couple of days before.

Jeffrey is not very talkative, but he responds all my questions politely. Gina, the youngest of the siblings, barely says anything; she prefers to play with her peers. Kimberly prefers to speak English rather than Spanish. Gradually we start to speak Spanish, though. Their American accent is quite strong. With each other they communicate in English and they speak Spanish with their parents. Verónica and Jerónimo do not speak English.

Before the arrival of her grandchildren Gloria was worried what food she would serve them. "*Puro cereal*" ["Only corn flakes"], she complained. Gloria was sure they wouldn't like spicy food. Contrary to her expectations, her grandchildren took to Oaxacan cuisine, though they did not eat chili. However, they often complain that they would like to eat pizza in San Ángel. Gloria

explains that in so doing they show their disrespect to *pueblo's* – and her own – poverty. Kimberly presents her genius for tact and diplomacy, explaining that even though San Ángel is impoverished, it is beautiful. Many second-generation children that come to the prime community think of it as a poor, infertile place. They are influenced by their parent's vision of imaginary homeland (Hirai 2009: 97). Jerónimo and Verónica remembered *pueblo* to be poor. Members of the second generation are also influenced by American social imaginary. Some of them believe that Mexican people wear ponchos and sombreros. The U.S. educative institutions transfer stereotypical cultural content and by that means socialize transnational children to homogeneity (Scott 1998).

One of the factors that influences transnational children's agency is their gender. Even though Kimberly is two years younger than Jeffrey, she feels responsible for him, assuming the role of foster mother during the holiday. In Spanish she tells me that she assures that Jeffrey would not exceed on sweets.

Kimberly: He just likes to eat pizza, all *junkfood* [she says in English the words written in italics]. So my mom put me in charge to look after him: do not take *soda*, do not eat *candy*, only twice a week he can take *soda*. And twice a week he can eat *candy*.

Researcher: And do you take care of him?

Kimberly: I take care for him because I'm more responsible.

When Verónica told her daughter that she was more reliable than her older brother, she increased girl's agency. It seems that although Kimberly is younger, she has higher level of agency than her brother.

When Verónica and Jerónimo decided to “send” their children to Mexico for holiday, they started building a house in San Ángel. I could observe it being constructed since the beginning. Bricklayers were working efficiently and fast. They were receiving money regularly, which motivated them to work well. In times of the American economic prosperity many migrants decided to build their houses in *pueblo*, and local builders had much work. However, the U.S. economic crisis badly hit transnational economy of San Ángel. Many of its members who live in the U.S. have lost their jobs and consequently their relatives in prime community receive fewer remittances. Some of the migrants were deported from the U.S., others were coming for a while to visit their families and were unable to cross the border back. Few community members could afford a new house.

When the siblings came to San Ángel in June, the house wasn't ready yet and Gina, Kimberly and Jeffrey stayed with their grandmothers (every few days they passed on from one grandmother's house to the other). Although they very much

liked to play in the building site, they were not allowed to, as it was dangerous. Instead, the children calmly frequented the place to supervise the construction. In fact, they administrate their parents' issues in the prime community.

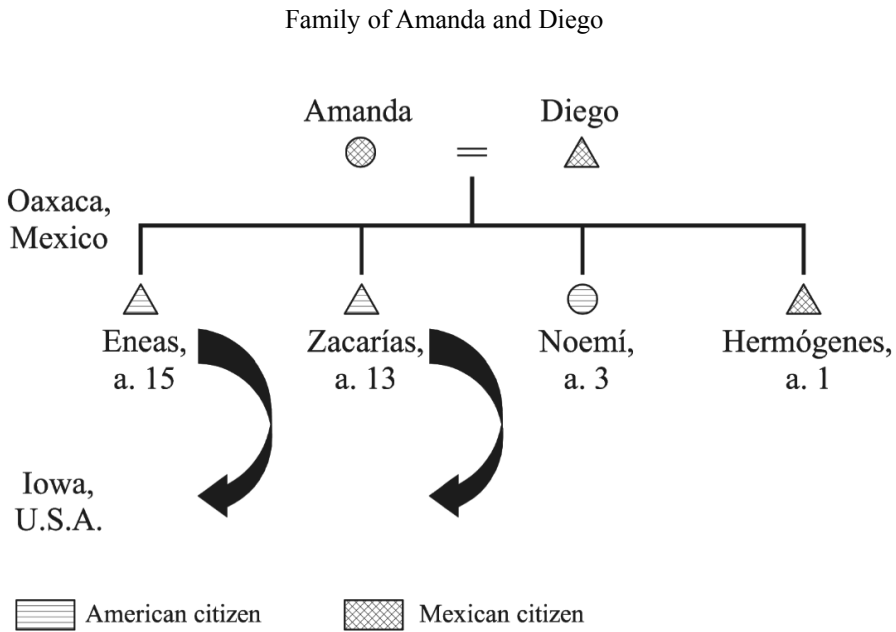
The U.S. citizenship increases the level of transnational child's agency. Michel Foucault demonstrated that power is not built-in certain institutions (1975). On the contrary, it is dispersed within social relations, families among others. We have to bear in mind, however, that power in families is not *inherently parental* (Tyrrell 2011: 26). Power and agency are continuously negotiated between family members. Analysis of agency requires including institutional frames and structures that shape human actions (Eisenstadt 2009: 58). Curiously, (il)legality is an important factor that can alternate or even redefine the dispersion of power within families. Traditionally in Mexico the level of parental agency is high, but migration, transnationalism and (il)legality may challenge this pattern. We can hypothesize that the citizenship might give power over "unauthorized" parents to second-generation children.

By categorizing individuals according to migratory status, the nation-state creates a deportable alien, i.e. an individual whose life is determined by the sovereign state power (De Genova 2010: 38). His or her deportability consists in uncertainty and insecurity about the future. A deportable individual is not sure whether they will be able to persist in their place of residence. By sowing this type of confusion among deportable persons, nation-state acquires what Wolfgang Sofsky has called "total power" (Sofsky 1997: 24). It can foil any plan of sovereign action of an individual. Building a house in Mexico is a rational strategy of deportable migrants uncertain of their ability to remain in the U.S. in the future. Some transnational parents have even decided to "send" their U.S.-born children to Mexico, guided by the fear of being deported and consequently having their children in state custody (Boehm 2012: 63, 127).

In transnational communities where a label "deportable" or "illegal" is rather a norm than an exception citizenship is a sort of a capital for second-generation children and for their parents. In spite of their age, Kimberly and Jeffrey understand the logic of deportability and illegality that concerns their parents. According to the existing law, when the U.S. citizens are of age, they can petition for regulating migratory status of their parents. Kimberly and Jeffrey already know that in eleven years time Jerónimo and Verónica will come to their house in San Ángel and Jeffrey *arreglará sus papeles* [he will put in right their documents]. It will let them come back to America.

CHILDREN OF AMADA AND DIEGO: U.S. CITIZENSHIP AS A MEANS TO REGAIN AGENCY

Figure 2.



Many transnational parents are incapable of regulating their immigration status in the U.S. before their children are of age. In such cases, deportation might disintegrate family. “Transnational families with members of mixed U.S. legal status living apart for years at a time have become a norm... since immigration legislation in 1990s and... post-9/11 U.S. practices”, as Deborah Boehm states it (2012: 16). Diego’s deportation fragmented his family. I heard his story several times. For the first time we listened to it with my Mexican colleague, anthropologist Lilia Solis Arellano. Diego and his wife Amada shared with us their transnational testimony. Later, during my fieldwork I often dropped in for a chat. They would always recall their sons who live in the state of Iowa, 15-years-old Eneas and 13-years-old Zacarías. Whilst we were talking, Amada and Diego would be playing with their younger children who live in San Ángel: Hermógenes, aged 1 and Noemí, aged 3. Hermógenes was born in Mexico, Noemí was born in the United States and she is a U.S. citizen. I heard the family story once again three months after I had met Diego and Amada, when Eneas and Zacarías came down to *pueblo* for holidays.

Diego was fifteen when he went to the U.S. for the first time. He worked in several states, but he chose to stay in Iowa. At the age of 20 he went to San Ángel. He was already an adult. His migration to the U.S. was rite of passage for him to become man (see: Boehm 2012: 120). Indeed, when young migrants visit prime communities, others perceive them to be men (Boehm 2012: 122). In 1995 in San Ángel he met and married four years younger Amada. They decided to go to the U.S. together. In 1997 Eneas was born. Birth of a child often changes transmigration into settlement (Górny 2010). Diego took steps to regulate his migratory status. In 1999 Zacarias was born and they bought a house in Iowa. In 2009 Noemí was born. However, in 2010 Diego lost the case in migratory court and he was offered to sign the order of voluntary departure<sup>1</sup>. He had three weeks to leave the U.S. to prevent himself from receiving the order of removal. They believed that in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico they would be able to apply for a Green Card and return to Iowa.

The decision-making whether to migrate shows explicitly children's agency (Tyrrell 2011). I was particularly interested how children and parents remembered inter-family negotiating. Eneas recalls when he was told about the family's departure to Mexico.

Eneas: My parents explained it to me, but I suppose Zacarías wasn't with us at the table. They told me that we were going to go to Mexico for about two months and that it was because of the documents. They told me that it was Immigration [and Customs Enforcement<sup>2</sup>] and stuff.

Researcher: When did they explain it to you?

Eneas: In the U.S. about two months before coming here, to Mexico. I suppose they told me it after my thirteenth birthday.

Naomi Tyrrell names three degrees of child's agency in decision-making on whether to migrate: the first one, when parent(s) inform(s) a child about their decision; the second, when parent(s) consult(s) "child over the decision to migrate"; and the third when a child participates "in making the decision to migrate" (Tyrrell 2011: 28). According to Eneas' testimony, his agency was restricted. Amada's account, also formulated in retrospect, presents less tokenistic consultation process.

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<sup>1</sup> Voluntary departure is a procedure which consists in leaving the U.S. at migrant's expense. It is considered a return by the U.S. authorities, i.e. an individual is not imposed certain amount of time when he or she cannot reenter the U.S. (Simansky, Sapp 2012: 2).

<sup>2</sup> An agency of Department of Homeland and Security, which is responsible for enforcing "the nation's immigration ... laws" (<http://www.ice.gov/careers/>).



Amada: I even talked to them [Eneas and Zacarías] and I told them: “If we go, it’s gonna be very hard to come back. And really, life in Mexico is completely different to life here [in the U.S.].

Diego: It’s a very abrupt change.

Amada: I said it to them and they told me: “No, mummy, we don’t wanna stay here. We’re a family and we’ve never separated and we’re not gonna separate now. Where one of us goes, off we all go!” The younger [Zacarías] told me that. So I said: “Well let’s go”.

Amada presents inter-family negotiating in which all the family members have equal decision-making roles. Zacarías, then aged 11, admits that he did not apprehend the reasons of their departure from Iowa. Although second-generation children understand their ability to help their parents to regulate their migratory status, the logic of deportation is beyond their comprehension. Amada did not receive deportation order, so, in spite of Diegos’ deportation, she could have stayed in Iowa. Though, the sense of responsibility for their offspring, the need of mutual support and solidarity influenced parents’ decision. Emotions and sentiments shape and structure the transnational mobility (Boehm 2012). Diego and Amada wanted to take care of their children by bringing them to their own hometown when it turned out that they wouldn’t get the Green Card in the U.S. consulate in Ciudad Juarez. Since transnational children have little agency in decision-making on whether to migrate (Massey 2009: 2–3), I agree with D. Boehm to call their mobility “placements” rather than “migrations” (Boehm 2012: 117).

Parental and child’s interpretations of the best interests of the latter are not always alike. For Eneas and Zacarías taking up education in Spanish was difficult, which is common for students who have always learnt in English (Hamann, Zúñiga 2011, Levitt 2001: 84). Their teacher’s attempts to facilitate their adaptation to Mexican school were insufficient and their colleagues behaved in a discriminative way.

Children experience significant shifts in economic status as they are “placed” in different parts of transnational space (Boehm et al. 2011: 12). Kevin, an U.S.-born son of another transnational couple from San Ángel could not believe that in Mexico they had their own detached house. In New York they used to rent a small apartment in Bronx, where he lived for 10 years. Once he was in San Ángel, he felt rich and his peers also perceived him in that way. “Stay-at-home” children, i.e. those who have not left prime community might feel jealous of the American clothes, backpacks and stationery that their classmates who have lived in the U.S. use. They might vent their anger and resentment mocking American accent or school problems of the latter.

Quarrels with peers, misunderstandings with teachers, linguistic problems and alleged low quality of teaching in Mexico made Eneas decide about his return to Iowa. Once again, the decision to emigrate was not preceded by inter-family negotiation.

Eneas: I wanted to go and I told my dad “I don’t wanna keep learnin’ here. I wanna go and learn there [in Iowa]”. And he asked “Why? You like it here”. I told him “Yes, I like Mexico, but not learning [here]”. So, he said “I’m gonna call your uncle. Let’s see what he says and if you can stay with them and stuff”.

By taking a decision independently, Eneas gained responsibility. He was able to decide for himself as a non-deportable person, an U.S. passport holder who can cross the border without the burden of “illegality”. On the other hand, his decision led to family separation. Amada and Diego let Zacarías choose either to return to Iowa or to stay with them. He decided to go with his older brother. Little children though, do not have autonomy in transnational movement (Boehm 2012: 126). The parents decided that Noemí would stay with them, hence she was a baby in 2010.

Various adults negotiate the placement of children in transnational space (*ibid.*: 118). Diego and his brother, an U.S. citizen made an arrangement that boys would stay with their uncle. Contrary to popular approach, transnational children sometimes prefer to stay with foster parents in another country than with their biological parents in the prime community (Shepler 2011). Diego and Amada gave up parental rights to Diego’s brother and sister-in-law. The latter provide economically for the boys.

“Transborder” parenthood (Stephen 2007) is riddled with difficult decisions. When I knew her, Amada was considering crossing the border without state’s authorization to be able to take care of her adolescent sons. State’s policy affects the most intimate sphere of migrants’ life. The story of Diego and Amada is not an isolated case. According to the U.S. Department of Homeland and Security, only between 1998 and 2007 more than 100,000 parents of U.S. citizen children were deported (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2009: 5). This number refers to all groups of foreigners; statistics concerning Mexicans are not available. However, since 2007 the number of removed parents has probably been much higher, in view of the fact that the total number of deportations was bigger in the years to come after 2007 (Simanski, Sapp 2012: 5). The pattern that all the family migrates to Mexico does not predominate after the deportation of one of its members. Deportations have fragmented most of the families in transnational community from San Ángel. In *pueblo* I came across a few men who were separated from their family as a result of deportation. Transborder fathering is

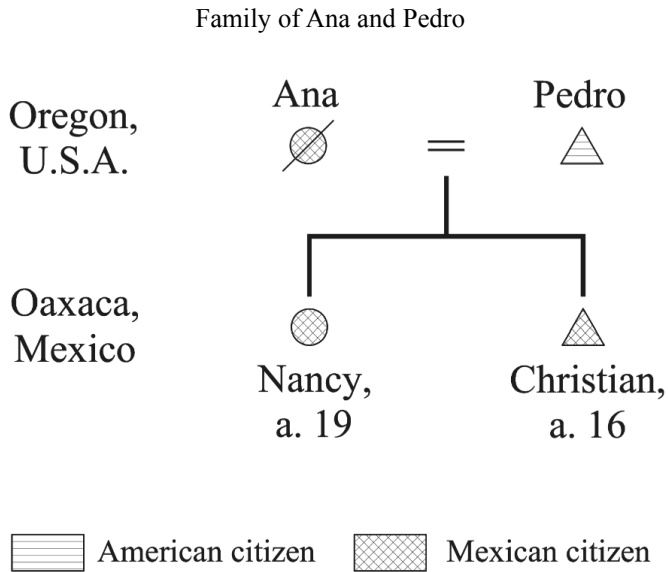
difficult. The authors of the introduction to the book “Everyday Ruptures” write that “social relations are ...—and have always been—reconstituted translocally” (Boehm et al. 2011: 10). In case of deported fathers who come to San Ángel alone contact with their spouses and offspring who stay in the U.S. often gradually disappears.

Transnational intimacy is marked both by continuity and disruptions (Boehm 2012: 15). Diego and Amada talk on the phone weekly with their sons. Eneas and Zacarías come to San Ángel for every summer holiday. In 2011 they saw their younger brother for the first time. In 2012 Hermógenes was already a toddler and his brothers played with him and with Noemí. They have much affection and tenderness for their younger siblings. The next year they come, Hermógenes will already have started to talk. As I have previously stated, for young Mexican males, transmigration to the U.S. and work experience is a kind of rite of passage to become a man. Eneas and Zacarías don’t presume to be adults. On the contrary, during their holidays in San Ángel all the family tries to “make up for lost time”. Eneas and Zacarías assume the role of sons, they search for tenderness and attention of their parents, something they feel they lack at their uncle’s home. They also take the role of elder brothers, taking care of their siblings. The continuity and disruptions of this family consists in seasonal variations: spending time together in the summertime and disruptions for the rest of the year.

#### CHILDREN OF ANA AND PEDRO: “ILLEGALITY” AS A DETERMINANT OF TRANSNATIONAL CHILDREN’S AGENCY

Hitherto I have expounded the agency of children who constitute the second generation of migrants. Rubén Rumbaut provides a useful categorization that concerns the age at which children migrate or are “placed” on the other side of nation-state border (Rumbaut 2004: 1167). Rumbaut proposes to call 1.25 generation youths that migrate between the age of 13 and 18. Many of them go directly to the workforce (*ibid.*) and they are less inclined to acculturation than those who can attend school in the U.S. The 1.5 cohort consists of children who migrate or are “placed” abroad between the age of 5 and 12. Finally, 1.75 generation are the children who are “placed” in the U.S. before their fifth birthday. According to Rubén Rumbaut, the generation 1.75 easily adapts to the receiving society and their experiences are similar to those of the U.S.-born second generation (*ibid.*). Its members often consider themselves Mexican Americans, are bilingual and they understand American culture codes. However, legal status might be a huge difference between the second and 1.75 generations.

Figure 3.



Nancy is 19 years old. I first knew her in March 2012. In the forthcoming three months I could observe her and talk with her on a daily basis, because I was her neighbor. I also knew her shy brother Christian and her two grandmothers who live in San Ángel. Nancy and Christian now live with their parental grandmother. I would often join that elderly woman for a chat, when she was spending hot evenings on the porch of her house to protect herself from the heat prevailing inside.

Nancy's biography has been marked with different placements. In the kaleidoscope of changing places where she lived, her parents were the only constant. She was born in Mexico City, but when she was one year old, her parents migrated to San Ángel. There her younger brother was born. When Christian was a baby and Nancy was three, all the nuclear family emigrated to the U.S. At this time Nancy's father, Pedro, was a U.S. permanent resident, but the rest of the family used false documents to enter the U.S. In state of Oregon kids went to preschool. In the U.S. they moved a lot and Nancy didn't participate in the decision-making over their relocations.

Nancy: We never were in one house; I have never grown up in one house. I can't say, "I grew up there". No. Since I was a girl I've moved a lot. From one apartment to another or from a house to another, or to an apartment. I have never been in a stable place... It has never been something serious. To be in a house.

Nancy did not pompously celebrate her fifteenth birthday as Mexican girls use to do. At the time her mother was suffering from cancer. She neither celebrated *sweet sixteen*, something that she had always dreamt of. Her mother Ana passed away when Nancy was 15. It was the first big separation in her life. Her mother would always speak to her in Spanish. After Ana's death Nancy would give up speaking Spanish.

Although she had lived for 15 years in the U.S. and graduated from American high school, she was "undocumented" migrant. A lawyer advised Pedro "to send" kids back to Mexico to put in right their migratory documents. In 2011 their father "placed" Nancy and Christian in Ciudad Juarez, where they would petition for documents. However, contrary to their attempts, they were imposed 10-years ban to reenter the U.S. Because it was impossible to come back, siblings were "placed" in San Ángel.

It was the second heartbreaking rupture in Nancy's and Christian's biographies. A deportation order separated them from their father who remains in the U.S. and provides for them economically. As D. Boehm puts it, "the U.S.-Mexico border... serves as a physical barrier to family reunification" (2012: 63). Placement in Oaxaca also separated Nancy from her friends. Now she keeps in contact with them only via Facebook.

Deportation order obliges an individual to alternate their life plans. The goals that we set have spatial aspect and they are related to certain territory. Christian hasn't graduated from high school yet; he participates in a distance-learning program. Internet connection in *pueblo* is bad and siblings frequently have to go to the state's capital where Christian can use the Internet on a daily basis. When I met Nancy, she was rethinking her plans for the future ("I haven't done anything in a year's time"). She declared that she wanted to attend a course in International Fashion Arts in Paris ("I'd like to go there for a time. It's only a three-month course. I suppose three months is ok for me, I don't want to be far away from my dad"). Two years after her deportation I found out that she has not done that and that she lives in San Ángel.

I am inclined to think that deportation entails far bigger culture shock for a member of 1.75 generation than for an individual who emigrated as a teen or adult. Children that constitute 1.75 generation are brought up not only by their parents of (im)migrant origin. In U.S., like in other so-called Western countries, children are "governed by both state and civic society" (Tyrrell 2011: 24, Boehm et al. 2011: 16–17). Also peer group influences on the socialization of the 1.75 cohort's members (Boehm et al. 2011: 11).

The identity of children who are labeled "deportable" and "undocumented" is unstable (Boehm 2012: 127).

Nancy: Practically I feel American, because I was brought up there [in the U.S.], my parents showed me American life and I don't... Yes, I'm Mexican, but I feel more American.

Nancy's Mexican identification is mainly political; it is a label that nation-states attach on transnational individuals on the basis of citizenship. Though Nancy was deported and refused by the U.S. nation-state, she perceives herself to be "more American".

Linguistic problems contribute to culture shock that experience migrant children after the deportation. Nancy and Christian lack fluency in Spanish. At the beginning of their stay in San Ángel the communication was very difficult:

Nancy: For three months I didn't speak anything. It was very difficult. My cousin's husband speaks English and I could communicate with him. I told him what I wanted and he said it to my grandmother. Or my dad called me and told my grandma what I wanted.

Moreover, there are other differences that contribute to culture shock. Transnational individuals brought up in the United States cannot accustom to gender-structured relations in Mexico.

Nancy: The people here are very narrow-minded. First of all, they can't stand seeing you talk with boys; secondly, [they criticize you for] the way you dress, the way you speak, with whom you hang around, with whom you go out, with whom you don't go out, who comes to see you at home or why comes to see you. This is different [than in the U.S].

Gender relations are structured differently *en ambos lados de la frontera* [on either side of the border]. The difference is even greater when we take into consideration that Nancy used to live in an American city. In San Ángel gendered relations consist in strong control of feminine sexuality, what once was called "marianismo" (Stevens 1974). In indigenous *pueblos* of Mexico gossip often serves as a way to control on women's sexuality (Gil Martínez 2006: 49). The age transforms the bargaining position of a transnational female. In case of Kimberly, being a girl could increase the level of her agency. Little girls' and boys' agency is created in different contexts than youths' and adults' (Boehm et al. 2011: 8).

## CONCLUSION

To explore the agency of transnational children I focused on a particular social situation, i.e. on their coming to a Mexican *pueblo*. I considered cases of children from so-called second generation, and 1.75 generation (children who experienced migration to the U.S. before their fifth birthday). I was interested how and why those children were “placed” in their parents’ place of origin and whether they had any agency in intergenerational decision-making.

Members of both 1.75 and of the second generation are bilingual, they go to American preschools and schools and many of them feel Mexican American. However, legal status might be a huge difference between the two categories. It is not my attempt to deny that the second generation in the United States suffers from discrimination and racism (Portes 2007: 665). I just want to emphasize that the second generation due to *ius soli* is non-deportable. Mexican children who were “placed” in the U.S. are deportable unless their migratory status could have been regulated. In my opinion, deportability is the most important predicate of transnational child’s agency. American citizenship is an important asset that may increase the level of agency in inter-family decision-making.

It is true, however, that the “threat of deportability” affects all the children of undocumented parents. In that sense, “illegality” also concerns the second-generation children. I agree with Joanna Dreby that it embraces “their fears of separation, awareness of illegality, and dissociation with their immigrant heritage” (Dreby 2012: 842). As Eneas’, Zacarías’ and Noemí’s example showed, the deportation of one member of the family entailed the placement of all the rest of it in Mexico. Sometimes, however, children choose to live with foster parents in their country of citizenship. The case of Eneas showed that his own educational ambitions confronted with his father’s removal caused that the members of the family couldn’t reside in the same nation-state. Diego’s deportation fragmented his family and demanded caregiving arrangements with his brother.

Michael Kearney (2006) emphasizes multidimensional influence of the nation-states’ borders on identity and class. It can be extrapolated on the field of gender. For transnational individuals border crossing entails subordination to different definitions of femininity and masculinity. Confrontation with *machista* Mexican culture for an individual brought up in the U.S. might therefore be a source of a culture shock. Indeed, social control and gender-structured relations in *pueblo* restrict Nancy’s agency and demand different behavior than the one that was accepted and expected in the U.S. Gender roles imposed over women in Mexico are often confronted with the figure of *macho* (Stevens 1974).

The influence of gender on transnational children is highly contextual. It seems that age determines this impact; the level of agency might be higher in case

of young girls. In the transnational community many people share the viewpoint that girls are more responsible than boys. Therefore adults put girls in charge of their sibling, including elder brothers.

I argue that deportability is an important determinant of transnational children's agency. This factor has often been disregarded in transnational studies. The impact of children's own deportability in case of 1.75 generation and of parents' deportability in case of the second generation shows the links between the nation-state and lives of families and their members. Nation-state labels individuals as "illegals". By doing that, it deprives them of agency. Giorgio Agamben (1998) introduces the concept of *bare life* that he ascribes to *homo sacer*, i.e. a human whose life is stripped of political significance (see also De Genova 2010). Deportation not only affects individuals, but also their families, by leading to heartbreaking ruptures, which cause pain and suffering (Boehm et al. 2011: 14-15). Neither in the U.S. nor in Mexico professional support is offered to members of fragmented families. Some of them can count with the support of the transnational community, but the wounds that the separation opens are not easy to heal.

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