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**CONSTRUCTING THE
CHILD WORK
EXPERIENCES:
RELATIONAL PROCESSES
AMONG THE CHILDREN
OF MONTE ALBAN,
MEXICO**

by

Laura Miriam Rodriguez-Cazares

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of**

Ph.D. in Anthropology

Durham University

2006

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Laura Miriam Rodriguez-Cazares

Chairperson of the Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Kate Hampshire
Department of Anthropology

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Abstract

It is a well-known fact that children in non-western societies make an important contribution to their families' survival. This thesis examines the characteristics of working children in a Mexican urban community, contributing to childhood studies that claim that children can be regarded in their own right. It argues that children are active agents in participating and constructing their working experiences through daily relationships. As it is expected by society, working children adapt to the needs and values of their local community when engaging in productive activities. However, this also allows them to reinterpret and negotiate their status within their society. By analysing the ethnographic material collected during fieldwork in a Mexican shanty town, this study examines from an integral approach, the notions children have of work, family and relationships in participating in daily survival.

Everyday activities and testimonies were recorded using observant participation, structured, semi-structured and informal interviews, in domestic and non-domestic places. Children of both genders, between the ages of 8 and 16 years, as well as other relatives and friends, were interviewed in order to understand how children perceive and negotiate their place within the household and beyond it. Children's daily endeavours and group discussions were recorded so as to reconstruct children's and adults' life histories, to compare working experiences of diverse generations and to trace their social networks.

The main key finding is that working children in Oaxaca occupy a dynamic role in participating in family survival. This allows them to create a set of experiences and to compare them to individuals of their own and other generations. Hence, the proposal adds to the approach that children are not passive subjects, but active agents, with critical points of view, elaborating their own experiences. This study also deduces children are able to express their active role when establishing relationships on their own initiative, i.e., by strengthening existing social networks or creating their own, or by consolidating peers' and friends' groups. In this sense, the children of this study are involved in a series of complex networks of relationships. It is through their relationships children integrate and shape their own knowledge, while participating in household survival and negotiating the demands of their households and local society. Thus, children's working experiences are not always restrictive or compelling. According to this thesis' findings, children can creatively construct them, expressing a variety of views, which count from positive, negative, and ambivalent.

	page
Introduction	1
1. Preface	1
2. Aim and research problem	1
3. Research questions	4
4. Structure of the thesis	5
Chapter 1: Literature Review	10
1 Introduction	10
1.2.1 Studies of childhood	10
1.2.2 The concept of socialisation	13
1.3 Work, division of labour and position of child work in the contemporary world	18
1.3.1 Approaches to child work	18
1.3.2 Economic approach	20
1.3.3 Developmental and educational approaches	21
1.3.4 The legal approach	22
1.3.5 The demographic approach	23
1.3.6 Classis theoretical frameworks within anthropology and sociology	24
1.3.7 Post-modern approaches	25
1.3.7.1 Constructionist and deconstructionist views	26
1.3.8 Child work, worldwide views	28
1.3.8.1 Western influence on child work	28
1.3.8.2 Conventions and notions about child work and child labour	28
1.3.8.3 The concepts of child labour and child work in social science disciplines	31
1.3.9 The importance of understanding children's accounts of working experiences	33
1.3.9.1 Child work, the intricate relationship between children, household and work	35
1.3.10 Work as socialisation	36
1.4 The experience of child work and the generational changes in relationships	38
1.4.1 Structure and agency	38
1.4.2 Age, gender and generation	40
1.4.3 Social networks of children	43
1.4.4 Relational processes	44
1.5 Conclusions	48
Chapter 2: Oaxaca City and its people	50
2. Introduction	50
2.1 Location	50
2.2 Oaxaca City	52
2.3 Economic history	55
2.4 Indians and mestizos	60
2.5 Work opportunities in Oaxaca City	65
2.6 Informal sector	67
2.7 Formal sector	68
2.8 Oaxaca's ethnic identity	70
2.9 Conclusions	74

Chapter 3: Methodology	75
3. Introduction	75
3.1. Approach to the analytical unit	75
3.2 Children's as research topic	78
3.3. Approaching the location	79
3.3.1 Informants	80
3.3.2 Sampling	84
3.3.3 Observation and participant observation	87
3.3.4 Informal, unstructured and semi-structured interviews	88
3.3.4.1 Unstructured interviews	89
3.3.4.2 Semi-structured interviews	89
3.3.5 Recording the interviews	90
3.3.6 Data	91
3.4 Children in their households	94
3.5 Children's places	96
3.6 Sunday meetings	96
3.7 Photographs	98
3.8 Confidentiality and informed consent	99
3.9 Reciprocity	100
3.10 Ethical and methodological problems encountered	100
3.10.1 Other ethical considerations: power relationships between adult researcher and adult participants	101
3.11 Conclusions	104
Chapter 4 Fieldwork setting: domestic organisation for survival in the colonia Monte Alban	106
4. Introduction	106
4.2 Location	106
4.2.1 The settlement: colonia Monte Alban	106
4.3 Socio-cultural and economic profile of migration	111
4.4. Living in the urban environment	115
4.4.1 Adults	115
4.4.2 Children	116
4.5 Living material conditions	117
4.5.1 Housing	118
4.5.1.1 Low income households	118
4.5.1.2 Room distribution	119
4.5.2 Electricity	121
4.5.3 Water supply	121
4.5.4 Telephone service	122
4.6 Civil, political and informal organisation groups	122
4.6.1 The demands and achievements of <i>colonos</i>	122
4.6.2 Rivalry between settlements	123
4.6.3 Youth informal groups	124
4.7 Routine	125
4.7.1 Morning	125
4.7.1.1 Children's activities in a typical day	126
4.7.1.2 Adult women activities	127
4.7.1.3 Men's activities	129
4.7.2 Family gatherings	129
4.7.3 Weekends	130
4.7.4 Non-routine activities-ritual life	132

4.7.4.1 Sunday mass	132
4.7.4.2 Graduation ceremonies	132
4.7.4.3 Fifteenth birthdays	133
4.7.4.4 All Saints' Day	135
4.8 Conclusion	136
 Chapter 5 The experience of work: Shaping notions of work through relationships within the household	 137
5. Introduction	137
5.1 Relationships within the household	137
5.2 Generation, gender and age categories	138
5.2.1 Generation	139
5.2.2 Gender	143
5.2.3 Age	147
5.2.4 The interplay of gender, age and generation in the light of work	150
5.3 Children's roles in the domestic division of work	152
5.3.1 Boys' and girls' household's contribution	153
5.3.2 Work, gender and social relationships of children	158
5.4 Generational differences in working experiences	163
5.5 Conclusions	168
 Chapter 6 Dynamics of everyday negotiation: agency and sense of community	 169
6. Introduction	169
6.2 Parental immigration and its effects on inter-generational perception of child work	173
6.3 Children's relationships and social networks	181
6.3.1 Peer relationships and friendship	185
6.4 Ambivalent forms of social networks	188
6.4.1 Family conflict as source of expanding social networks	189
6.5 Conclusions	193
 Chapter 7 Beyond household work: Negotiating children's working status on the streets and other public places	 197
7. Introduction	197
7.1 Conceptualising visible work from adults' and children's point of views	200
7.2 Working in the streets: boys negotiating space	201
7.2.1 Intergenerational working experiences on the streets	206
Case Study 1	206
7.3 Working in the market: girls and the use of space	210
7.3.1 Girls' negotiating space and relationships	211
Case Study 2	212
Case Study 3	214
7.4 Participating in the local community: communal work	217
7.4.1 Children involved in community cooperation	217
7.4.2 Coming of age, <i>fiesta de 15 años</i>	219
7.4.3 Community work, boys' participation	224
7.4 Conclusion	228
 Chapter 8 Conclusions	 230
8. Introduction	230

8.2 Overview of the chapters' discussions	230
8.3 The nature of child work: social relationships	234
8.4 Final remarks	237
Appendix A: Children's profiles	239
Bibliography	255

Introduction

1. Preface

The first time I visited Oaxaca City in 1996, I was very aware of working children. Particularly visible were the street vendors in the main square. I saw children of all ages offering their services, or selling their merchandise. Shoe-shiners such as Rodrigo, a 10 year old boy, were among the many children walking along the arcades, late at night, when all other children were supposed to be asleep. Rodrigo had been working since the age of eight. First working accompanied by an older cousin, and later alone. I met Rodrigo on other occasions: sometimes he looked absorbed in his own thoughts; other times he was in the company of his friends, other street sellers, singing songs accompanied by the guitar of one of them. There seemed to be a contrasting but complementary relationship between his commitment to work every night, and his eagerness to socialise with his friends. There were evenings for him dedicated entirely to shine shoes, but other nights when I saw him, he would find the time to do his work, while being entertained by his friends. It did not seem like a straightforward occupation, but like one where he was not exclusively burdened by sleepless nights. So, I was intrigued by the way he balanced his commitment to service, finding also time to play every now and then. Soon, thanks to him, I learned of other children working in similar activities in other parts of the city (market, La virgin de la Soledad Cathedral, the Dominican Abbey) that were living in the same neighbourhood. Soon, I was introduced to the colonia Monte Alban and an NGO that, coincidentally, led workshops in the colonia Monte Alban and other settlements.

2. Aim and research problem

The central aim of this thesis is to discover how children understand the notion of work and how this perception allows them to balance their domestic roles with their working status through their interpretation of cultural values. Children's attitudes towards work will be influenced by the working tradition at home and their own experiences, but I also ask the question about whether children's participation in the workforce influences societal values towards working children.



This study is an examination of working children in an urban shanty town, in Oaxaca City, and its link with social and economic relationships in the household, as well as the meanings entailing children's daily productive participation.

My interest focusing on working children stems from previous research, carried out few years ago in another urban community in Mexico (1996). As I realised back then, children were actively engaged in economic activities, which were not always compensated with a salary. Instead, adults perceived these contributions as obligatory, whereas children felt unrecognised. This apparent imbalance at times created difficult situations that impinged not only the productive sphere, but also the ways household members managed these relationships. Therefore, the motivation to study working children when constructing their experiences is to emphasise the significance of work from the children's points of view. Hence, children are granted the opportunity to express that work is not merely a survival activity, but an integral part of their identity. On top, work is valued as a way of being and existing. It entails a variety of meanings through the relationships it involves.

This area of Mexico, historically going through long periods of economic disengagement from the mainstream national economy, has largely depended on agricultural production. The Oaxacan economy has resorted to economic activities that do not rely on wages, but those activities considered out of the formal labour market, and services (tourism).

Children are active participants in contributing to the survival of their families and communities, in and outside the household. So, children's contribution can be critical for household survival, when other alternatives fail to deliver appropriate support and ways to cope with their poverty (i.e., poor state support, limited skilled labour market, training alternatives). In approaching the households under analysis, it is possible to see how the household is structured in such a way that requires the work of children in adapting to the dynamics of the urban economy. Children work not just to cover the needs which otherwise would be fulfilled by an organised economy, but when the conditions within the household require it (illness, migration of some of the adults, death, divorce, etc).

There is an underlying cultural set of practices that traditionally place children in the role of co-providers, as is also the case among rural households, where children's participation is not only required, but culturally accepted. Tradition (indigenous and rural background) in working practices however does not exclude children from deviating from cultural patterns when they are employed in paid activities. In such activities usually children have many advantages due to their charismatic or docile features to attract their employees or customers, such as the juvenile maids or the street sellers and mime artists. Achieving their role as co-providers, they not only enable the continued existence for their household, but also by working they participate in reproducing a system of values characterised for its traditional link to the community and the importance of supporting each other. However, in contrast with the working experiences of parents (past and present), influenced by the urban environment; children seem to be placed in an ambiguous situation between their community values, their daily family needs, and their own future aspirations.

This study examines how children negotiate the apparent contradictions between what their families and communities hold as important and necessary (survival and cultural tradition), and what children can offer and wish to do for themselves.

In searching for the ways in which children construct their work experience in everyday relationships, it has been necessary to draw a wider picture that is not limited to children's own accounts. Parents' and other adults' participation has been important in understanding how child work is interpreted by diverse agents involved in a link of past and present actions. In doing so, it is possible to observe how children's work and lives are determined by their society's cultural system, and at what extent they are able to contest it. By listening to and observing children in their everyday actions, it is possible to have a better understanding of how children are regarded by their community, what is expected from them, and what children think of themselves when actively participating in their own survival. Their active roles not only influence a dominant ideal of family and childhood, but also local traditions in work organisation and cooperation within the community. Thus, it has been essential for this study to take an integral approach that contemplates children, adults, and the community in a diachronic analysis. Looking at the past allows me to grasp significant changes that have influenced views and values towards work, family and

community. So, the working experience of children cannot be isolated from these elements, if children were to be acknowledged in their own right, contemplating the whole picture makes the problem more attainable when making sense of children's places in society.

3 Research questions

This thesis aims to investigate:

1. Children's notions of work in a marginal society, i.e., how children's notions of work are shaped by their social environment and at the same time influence it.
2. Children negotiating domestic roles (i.e. as co-providers) and participating in decision-making processes within the household and local community.
3. The extent to which children and parents share sociocultural values in their experiences of work.
4. The importance of children acting as economic and cultural agents in interpreting their environment to construct their own working experience.
5. The relationships that help children to define their working identity, i.e., through social networks, friendships and other means.
6. The socialization and the nature of interrelationships of children with other members of their household and community.
7. The social categories of gender, age and generation, as shaping elements of children's relationships within work.
8. The allocation of work and negotiation of authority for working children in the colonia Monte Alban.
9. Adults' past experiences, mainly focused on migration and how this influence children's perceptions of work.

These queries intend to examine the level of children's active participation in daily endeavours for household survival in a marginalised environment. Although the central analytical unit is the children, I could not disregard the participation of adults in living the experience of work.

4. Structure of the thesis¹

Chapter 1 discusses the literature on childhood and child work. The first section examines the ways in which childhood has been conceptualised by social sciences and the role that children have occupied of research within anthropology and sociology. In section 2, I present views of the conceptual differences between work and labour. I review some of the diverse approaches to child work that have been followed by the social sciences, and how these have influenced policy making in striving to regularise child labour worldwide. Further in the same section, I examine the importance of children's accounts as productive agents and how their roles differ significantly from adults' work. This is necessarily linked to their role as domestic contributors to household survival and how families and children conceive work from different experiences. In section 3, I present a discussion about children as agents and children partaking in social structure. In doing so, it is important to define the categories that affect these relationships and children shaping their own experiences, named age, gender, ethnicity and generation. Every one of these categories is interlinked to make it possible for agents not only to reproduce their own society's patterns, but at some level, to influence these, if not in space, maybe in a temporal level. Through an analysis of relational processes, it is possible to observe how relationships influence the ways in which children's experiences might shape society over space and time, and vice versa, in what Archer (1998) described as the interplay of agency and structure.

Chapter 2 introduces some general aspects of urban Oaxaca's history, some socio-economic and cultural background. It presents the particular economic and socio-cultural characteristics that make possible the existence of child work. It describes how the historical changes and the location with its particular geography have encroached the State of Oaxaca in long periods of poverty and low development through the hundreds of years since the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors. In a second section, the description is focused on the socio-cultural differences observed among the population in Oaxaca City. In the present, the rural background of the inhabitants who migrated to the City of Oaxaca, has brought them advantages and disadvantages in settling in the various shanty-towns around the city. Preserving other

¹ See table 1, at the end of this section.

cultural aspects, such as their indigenous identity, their eagerness to work and their sense of community, has allowed immigrants to adapt to urban life. However, their limited skills to work has put pressure on other members of the households to employ themselves in unskilled jobs, within the informal market, which will be described in a next section in this chapter (working conditions, informal or formal economy). Finally, in the last part of the chapter, there is a description of local cultural features, and the way households share work loads according to gender and custom.

Chapter 3 discusses the research methods followed throughout the process of this research, describing in detail the approach utilised during fieldwork in Oaxaca. I also present the children and adults involved in this research and the obstacles I faced when conducting fieldwork. The first part is centred on the reasons why children are important research subjects and the strategies utilized to approach children and their families in the setting. I then discuss the sample chosen and the obstacles faced when designating the parameters for the profile of children, and the ways children joined and participated in the group and individual interviews. This account also tackles the problems in how to approach children by adapting the methodology to my needs and their disposition as collaborators (Grover 2004). Finally, it also describes the methodological themes and the reasons why children and families in this research in order to obtain a comprehensive analysis of childwork and its importance within the household context as to analyse children and their relationships (Mandell 1991).

In Chapter 4 I illustrate the setting of my field work. The colonia Monte Alban is characterised by its poverty and lack of organised economy. The objective of presenting this descriptive chapter is to portray the environment in which children work and interact with the various agents involved, i.e., their parents, neighbours and relatives. It intends to offer an account of everyday issues that allow framing the kind of environment in which children maintain their daily endeavours in contributing to their family survival. There is a description of the settlement, its origin and organisation and the historical and socio-economic reasons for its expansion in disadvantage conditions. Lack of infrastructure, however has allowed settlers to organise themselves to adapt to the physical conditions and poverty, implementing a series of economic strategies that allows them to exist within the outskirts of the old Oaxaca City. The final part is dedicated to the description of a typical day and the way

households organise for daily activities and recreation.

Chapter 5 considers the ways households are organised for reproduction and how elements such as age, gender and generation play a determining role in children's working experiences. Examining these categories from a relational perspective, it is possible to understand how the experience of work is constructed through the relationships between agents and society (Archer 1995). By referring to this interplay, the intention is to draw attention to the fact that work is not a predetermined concept, but a notion experienced by agents in relating to diverse people and activities (Grint 1991). So, the relevance of this chapter is to study how children cope with the everyday necessities and how they negotiate their position and participate or not in decision making processes.

In Chapter 6 I present the socio-economic transformations families in the settlement have lived and how these affected children's roles in the domestic economy. It highlights the processes of migration, peer relationships, friendships and social networks as coping responses to economic limitations. In doing so, the working experience unfold in two directions, 1) in allowing children to participate actively in their household survival and by adjusting to day to day responses –short term response, and 2) in adapting to traditional ways of working for family and the community continuity –long term response. Such elements support not only the aptitude of children to negotiate within their everyday relationships and requirements, but also to place themselves within certain roles and statuses by creating their own networks and initiatives to work and cooperate.

Chapter 7 examines children's relationships in constructing their working experience in non-domestic environments. The analysis is focused in more subjective, non-economic meanings of the children's work in relating to various environments and people through the city and the colonia. So, it gives relevance to working activities which give meaning to children's activities: some control, autonomy and way to interpret their activities as giving a sense of self-esteem. This varies also according to gender and the spaces where they take place as much to the people to whom children relate. The first part of the chapter is dedicated to study the contrast between children's views of their work in public spaces and the notions children hold of

themselves as workers and the more subjective meanings their work entails, so it presents some case studies to illustrate this. As for the second part, it examines the way children are engaged in community-traditional and rural based ways of work participation, which entail more abstract meanings as to create identity and membership values.

Finally, in Chapter 8 I provide a list of conclusions drawn on my empirical chapters, as briefly outlined above, and provide a brief list of future research issues, while discussing the relevance and significance of my research approach and results to the existing scientific literature.

Table 1. Relevant concepts and areas of the thesis.

Chapter	Description	Features
Introduction	Approaching the research problem, aims and questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children's notions of work • Constructing the working experiences and relationships • Agency and structure • Children negotiating their social status • Children as co-providers • Household as unit of analysis
1. Literature Review	Discussion of the relevant literature in childhood and child work studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sociological and anthropological approaches to childhood and work • Differences between work and labour • Children as productive agents and relationships • Agency and structure • Age, gender and generation categories in relationships • Relational processes
2. Oaxaca City and its people	General aspects of Oaxaca City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical, economic, cultural and social aspects of Oaxaca City
3. Methodology	Technique used to approach the problem of working children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach to the analytical unit. • Techniques used: • Observant participation, structured, semi-structured interviews • Informants and sampling. • Analysis of data
4. Fieldwork setting: domestic organisation for survival in the colonia Monte Alban	Ethnographic description of the location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Characteristics of location and participants. • Significant non-productive activities, rituality
5. The experience of work. Shaping notions of work through relationships	Importance of household and children working status within	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic organisation for reproduction. • Variables shaping relationships • Work experiences constructed through the relationships between agency and society
6. Dynamics of everyday negotiation: agency and sense of community	Household experience of work for children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socio-economic transformations affecting work and relationships • Migration and social networks of children. • Peers and friends
7. Beyond household work: negotiating children's working status on the streets and other public places	Children working in public places and negotiating their status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relating to public spaces and non-domestic agents • Managing work and leisure • Constructing social networks • Participation in community and traditional work
8. Conclusions	Results of research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children actively construct their working experiences through relationships • Children influence society, but at the same time are shaped by it • Work as the means to relate to other people and environments • Working concepts vary to diverse societies and experiences; there is a tendency to share aspects with other societies: interplay of agency and structure

Chapter 1

Literature Review

1. Introduction

Research into working children entails studying childhood and socialisation patterns, alongside the activities through which children negotiate their position as economic contributors within and outside their work environment. Previous studies of childhood have addressed these ideas in different ways, each related to specific points of view, and supported by various schools of anthropological thought. Moreover, the investigation of the dynamics of childhood studies has been influenced by conceptual changes, resulting in vigorous debates in relevant literature. In what follows, I review socialisation theories regarding children, and at the same time I investigate the developments and shifts in anthropological trends relating to the study of children and childhood. First, I will examine social theories concerned with understanding concepts of “childhood”, and then discuss how these have evolved, from generalisations, to become constructed concepts, providing categorisations which reflect cross-cultural variations (Gergen 1985; James & Prout 1997; Jenks 1996; Stainton Rogers 1992). I will also explore the related theoretical debates surrounding children’s upbringing from an anthropological viewpoint. The second part of the chapter will deal with concepts of labour and work, and explain why I have chosen the latter term over the former. Finally, in the last part, I will review recent approaches that widen our understanding of working children’s participation within the process of domestic decision-making, and the relationship between agency and structure in the processes from an intergenerational point of view.

1.2.1 Studies of childhood

The interest in childhood studies has developed from being a peripheral subject of analysis (traditional socialisation approaches used in sociology, anthropology and psychology), to a central one in recent times, with post-modern approaches being employed, such as constructionism (Jenks 1996, James et al. 1998, Stainton Rogers 1989). Although currently anthropology is one of the main social sciences concerned

with understanding children as social subjects (Nieuwenhuys 1996; James et al. 1998; Panter-Brick et al. 1998), this has not always been the case (Schwartzman 2001, 1). Originally, while studying “*primitive societies*”, anthropological research had not aimed at understanding children per se, but at comprehending the comparative and contrasting elements between “*primitive and civilised societies*”, according to the evolutionist theory (Lévy-Bruhl 1985; Jenks 1996: 4). In order to gain understanding of adult societies, anthropology tended to compare the “primitivism” of different societies, as children were assumed to exhibit incomplete characteristics of personhood (Malinowski 1961). Fuelled by the great debates on the evolutionary biosocial studies in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, some schools of anthropology, such as the North American school, emphasised the value of the *nurture* theory against the *natural* determination of the human traits as proposed by *Social Darwinism* (Harris 1969, 123). In a quest to interpret society, some other scientists at the time adapted biological concepts for the understanding of human societies (Harris 1969: 123). Galton (1865), a eugenicist, for instance, proposed that nature was more relevant than nurture in the determination of the human social character. The principle that nature was determinant into the social character of the human existence influenced the nascent science of anthropology, with a strong evolutionists view approach (Freeman 1996: 9-11)². This principle, based on the natural selection theory of Darwin, fuelled a strong propagandistic debate about how non-western societies were considered from a biological point of view³ (Harris 1969: 63). It was through fieldwork around the world, that new theories were developed as a way of overcoming the nineteenth century social evolutionist theory (Kaplan & Manners 1972: 36-37).

In the United States, the culture and personality school in anthropology developed alternative frameworks and came up with the concept of *cultural relativism* (ibid.). The concept of cultural relativism did not only allow for the cross-cultural comparison of societies, but at the same time created a basis for criticising the *eugenicist* doctrine of the “superior society”. Adhering to the concept of cultural relativism, in the United States Boas’ pupils began to focus on child-rearing practices in order to understand

² According to Kaplan & Manners (1972), evolutionism was already present in the works of Comte, Hegel, Marx and Spencer, prior to the publication of the *Origin of the Species*. Their evolutionism was more influenced by the French philosophers’ writings during the Enlightenment (p. 36n).

³ Comte, for instance, compared organisms with societies following the principle of “functionalism”, which influenced the works of Malinowski.

the relationship between individuals and society (Kaplan & Manners 1972: 134). The main assumption of the *culture and personality* school was that “culture permeates the lives of individual members of society”, a trait that individuals alone cannot control or modify (Freeman 1996: 46). This was particularly observed through the rearing practices in different parts of the world, as a way to compare them and detail their different socio-cultural patterns and values attached, an approach that prolonged until the mid sixties (Whitting, 1963). Though the interest of some representatives of this school were focused on determining the effects of personality upon culture, a more general emphasis was placed on the above mentioned assumption, shaping their theory of early socialisation (Kaplan and Manners 1972: 135).

Margaret Mead, as one of the main proponents of the North American *cultural and personality* school, supported the ideas of *cultural relativism* and *cultural instances* as a way to present cases of societies where the rules of the western norms of children’s socialisation did not apply (Mead 1949). Children for the first time were seen under a different light and although anthropology was still endeavouring to understand society from an adult point of view, they were subjected to a more rigorous examination (Mead & Wolfenstein 1955). Mead’s important contribution was the suggestion that sociological and psychological approaches could aid the understanding of adult societies through the examination of their children’s socialisation. This approach though was not entirely satisfactory, because psychology and sociology did not offer the means to understand fully children’s socialisation process. In essence, this theory was conceived from the adults’ point of view in order to understand adult societies.

In Europe, anthropologists were influenced by the sociological principles that portrayed the society as an organic system. The contribution of Durkheim (collective consciousness) was of considerable value as it allowed anthropologists and other social scientists to understand how social groups bonded through the sharing of values and norms. Durkheim’s work highlighted the predominance of collective consciousness in “primitive societies” in contrast to a greater sense of individuality in societies of a more elaborate labour division (Durkheim 1984: 272-275). Even though some conceptual adjustments were made to Durkheim’s ideas, his main influence prevailed through Malinowski’s work, embodied in what he called the *functionalist school of anthropology*. Malinowski believed that fieldwork within contemporary

“primitive societies” was essential to understanding the evolution of modern societies and to comprehend the limits of universal concepts (e.g., incest). While conducting field work among the *Trobriand* islanders in north-eastern New Guinea⁴, he gathered information in order to compare the contemporary sexual habits of the local child population with European traits. Following the bio-psychological concepts and the functionalism of Durkheim, Malinowski’s results led him to conclude that “every custom exist to fulfil a purpose, and so all customs have a living, current meaning for members of a society (Kuper 1996: 24). Hence, children were not identified as a separate social category, still not worthy of examination in their own right. Previously, children were regarded, mostly as ethnographical material that allowed anthropologists such as Malinowski to observe and study society as functioning (Harris 1969: 549). Other European anthropologists centred their interests on family and kinship studies (Radcliffe-Brown 1987; Fortes 1970), where children were not the particular subjects of study. Children, as other family and kinship members, were considered as parts of structural systems, and not the centre of such studies (see Schwartzman 2001: 22-23, for a detailed review on the subject).

1.2.2 The concept of socialisation

Mead, as a scholar of the *culture and personality* tradition, defined *socialisation*⁵ as a cultural process of becoming a full member of society. This process was marked by age, stages and rites of passage which defined changes in activities and areas of performance. Mead (1955) pointed out that child development was a result of accumulative knowledge that allowed children to move from one developmental stage to another until reaching adulthood and, eventually, becoming recognised as *full human beings*⁶. By carrying out comparative analysis between South Pacific and

⁴ “Sex and Repression in Savage Society” (1927 [2001]).

⁵ Brim (1966) defines *socialisation* as “the process through which individuals acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that enable them to participate as more or less effective members of groups and the society.”

Socialisation, [is] the process by which human children who are born potentially human, become human, able to function within the societies in which they are born [...] (Mead, in Williams, 1983: v).

It is the way in which all these thousands of items, most of which are shared with other cultures, are patterned or fitted together to make a whole. Within these patterns children grow up, young people learn to be parents, people age and die in terms of the complex learning which has been provided for them and which they have evoked from others, from birth to death (Ibid: 8-9).

North American societies, Mead identified the leading role played by culture in creating patterns of socialisation (Mead 1931).

Mead believed that, due to the similarities in parent-child relationships and beliefs regarding family relationships, it was possible to compare childhoods in different societies, with the common elements forming the basis of comparison (Mead 1949, ix). While conducting fieldwork in Samoa in 1925, she observed that the Samoan youngsters experienced adolescence without the troubles of the North-American teenagers (Freeman 1996: 78). The sociological evidence for explaining such contrasts was provided by *cultural determinism*, in what Mead called the “negative instance” (ibid 82) as opposed to *cultural patterns* of North American society. Mead’s evidence proved that the nature theory had failed to offer an explanation for the divergence displayed in the comparison of these two very different societies.

From the results of Mead’s work, researchers understood that the study of children could provide proof for the analytical assumptions of cultural personality theory. According to this theory, children are born as “empty” beings and are culturally programmed in a growing up process, shaped by culture. Opposing biological determinism, socialisation theory suggests that children learn to tame their innate instincts through socialisation and to transform them into their culture’s accepted value system. By tracing the knowledge that children accumulate from infancy allowed researchers, such as Whiting et al. (1963) to obtain a comprehensible understanding of adult social behaviour.

Socialisation theory was principally oriented towards the conception of adult societies. If children were going to be the point of reference, the methodological approach would have to be rethought and modified to account for their experiences during their socialization process. The image of children put forward by Mead and others portrayed children as passive malleable subjects of socialisation. Children were peripheral in cultural studies as the North-American school of anthropology demonstrated through its *theory of acculturation* (Harris 1969; Kaplan and Manners

⁶ *Humanity as we know is not merely a matter of our human physique, of our prehensile thumbs, upright posture, and highly developed brains, but of our capacity to accumulate and built upon the inventions and experience of previous generations. A child who does not participate in this great body of tradition, whether because of defect, neglect, injury, a disease, never becomes fully human* (Mead & Wolfenstein 1955:6).

1972). This approach was proposed in order to provide a view of the means available to individuals to learn their local culture and to integrate with it.

In the 1950s, Talcott Parsons (1956) developed the concept of *social system* as a key concept in understanding the dynamics of society and how these determine the individual's character. Successful integration in society means that individuals surrender themselves to a controlling system that guides their actions through constraints (Parsons 1971). This approach proposes the study of society as a whole, which is more important than its parts. Hence, the interest is focused on the understanding of the functionality of the social norms through their imposition on infancy and childhood: "Beyond this the social norms also provide the source of 'identity' between the individual actor and the complete system, and the overall social order itself resides in the identity between the actor and the system" (quoted in Jenks 1996: 16). Parsons was not interested either in the study of children per se, but in the result of the imposition of society norms on children's actions. Deviation in childhood was perceived as the inability to comply with the society's norms (ibid, 20).

More recently, taking a very different view, Strathern (1988) claims that children are not pre-social beings, which need to be socialised so as to become fully human. Although Strathern's studies are not focused on children, her approach offers some conceptual principles for understanding how human beings (including children) relate to each other and create their identities. Strathern stresses the importance of identity, including gender identity, which is generated by same-sex and cross-sex relationships. In this case, gender identities are not imposed upon individuals by culture and society, but are produced through everyday interactions, particularly those which are relevant for every community. Identity is thus constantly forged through relationships underlying the entire process (such as economic ones: from production to exchange and consumption). According to Strathern, relationships and identity come about in the personification of individuals through social action, and not because of pre-social established cultural patterns.⁷

⁷ *Children are not born as natural, asocial beings. This returns us to the original point: social relationships are not constructed after the event, so to speak, through posterior socialisation [...]*

Contemporary anthropological studies have endeavoured to fill theoretical as well as methodological gaps and have given children a more active place in the fieldwork (Baker 1998; James 1983, 1993; Nieuwenhuys 1994; Hull 1981). Their results, based on the children's own testimonies and narratives, have produced an understanding of children's, as opposed to adults' worlds and the realisation of the existence of a specific *culture of children* (James 1983). Their studies contain many references to experiences which are exclusive to children as play and education (Mayall 2001), relationships within family (Solberg 1997), children's community participation (Kjorholt 2002) and language coding (James 1983, James 1995). To understand how children are active agents of socialisation, it is important to highlight the kind of participation they have in the process. It is also important to stress the relevance of the approach that children *learn by doing* (James 1983; Nieuwenhuys 1994: 12; Gittins 1999), as while embarking on a series of actions (e.g., domestic work) children manipulate not only their *active* responses, but also their environment. Therefore, children internalise and interpret their acquired knowledge in order to establish a place in their societies. Hence, it is important to clarify here, that children *negotiate their identities* (James 1983; Baker 1998; James et al. 1997). This implies that their socialisation is not a straightforward process divorced from the children's own accounts, as it was conceived in earlier studies by culture and personality and developmental psychology (see in Kaplan & Manners 1972). It is a more complex problem which encompasses a series of contradictions expressed through children's sayings, actions and beliefs. James et al. (1997) state that socialisation occurs as a structured cultural pattern that is not simply imposed upon children by society, but where they act as active participants.

Children participate actively not only in their own and other children's socialisation (James 1983, Tracynski 2000), but as has been observed, for instance, among international immigrants, also assisting their parents in their socialisation and understanding of the local societies (Mayall 2002: 106-107; Song 2001: 57). Within these relationships, though, children assume more dynamic relationships, rather than

Social relations are imagined as a precondition for action, not simply as a result of it. Sociality is thus not to be visualized as a superstructural elaboration of other forces and collective life does not evince sociality in an enhanced, hegemonic form (Strathern 1988: 321).

exclusively complying with unidirectional or authoritarian attitudes, or simply adjusting to socialising patterns within particular societies' values towards work, e.g., combining school and part time work in the United States and Germany (Hansen et al. 2001). Children in these contexts usually play the role of carers, interpreters and breadwinners (Reynolds 1991:76; Kenny 1997: 99; Becker et al. 2001: 76). In Brazil, for instance, children become the primary income earners, converting themselves into "heads of the households" (Kenny 1997: 139); or co-providers (Traczynski 2000) or in Nepal, as Baker reported (1998: 97) where rural children migrate seasonally to Kathmandu in order to work in carpet factories, becoming part of a network of mutual support. This does not only offer them a sense of belonging and recognition, but also places them as a link between their own culture and the one that receives them as in the case of children immigrants looking for work. Children from this perspective create their own life style, in what Baker & Panter-Brick (2000: 161-181) conceptualise as children's careers, where children are decision-making agents that decide to abandon their household based on a variety of reasons. These decisions usually do not only involve children, but their families and the experiences and aspirations they face, when living away from home. This perspective presents children as active decision-makers of their own lives. Children become actors in deciding the course of their lives, or supporting their families' lifestyles, such as in the case of families of Chinese immigrants moving to England. The children of these families act not only as language translators, but cultural interpreters to their families, which allow their families to survive and, to some extent, to adapt to a new social environment (Song 2001).

Several contemporary studies have focused on children, by considering them as conscious and active agents (Morrow 1995; Jenks 1996; James & Prout 1997; James et al. 1998; Davis 1998). In this view, children's appropriation of their cultural universe is recreated across generations and interrelationships.⁸ For example, work for children, such as the child workers of many non-western societies, inevitably constitutes a significant amount of everyday activities and the domestic division of labour (Punch 2001). Within this context, it is essential to observe how work during

⁸ "Socialisation is not merely the replication of social order but the temporal process by which social order is reproduced and it is the young who are the instigators of it. It is a process of transmission and transformation wrought by the experiences of paradox, by which Giddens calls the becoming of the possible" (James 1983: 38).

socialisation moderates the patterns of relationships and negotiations within the daily lives of children. This last point provides the focal position maintained in this thesis.

To summarize, the concept of socialisation is seen to be instrumental for describing the social processes involved in the up-bringing of children and how this leads to adulthood (Berger and Luckman 1971; Whiting 1963). According to the classic concept (*culture and personality* school), socialisation takes place in everyday activities, shaped by cultural determinants, social relationships, emotional expressions and local habits. Within the socialisation framework, children are regarded as acquiring specific knowledge which allows them to bond and to become part of their society under socio-cultural values. This is due to the belief that children are malleable material which can be shaped by the cultural norms of each specific society (Williams 1983). The study of socialisation however, has recently taken a new turn, and is now focused on the children's accounts, in what James has termed as the *culture of children*⁹ (James et al. 1998). From this point of view, it is believed that children are active participants of their own agency, as in relationships to adults, but also in reference to child to child relationships, as to create their identity (Ibid, Rabello de Castro 2004).

In the following sections, it is intended to assess the theoretical approaches put forward in this thesis, in order to arrive at a meaningful and useful contribution to the understanding of the complexities of childhood and the children's relationships to the world of work.

1.3 Work, division of labour and position of child work in the contemporary world.

1.3.1 Approaches to child work

The productive role of children is not a new feature as it has been recorded in other historical and cross-cultural studies (McKelway 1906; Davin 1996; Whiting et al.

⁹ According to James (1983), the culture of children refers to the specific characteristics of children's socialisation patterns among themselves. In her view, children socialise each other and have cultural elements that they share with each other.

1963; Whiting et al. 1988). Economic forces and cultural factors regarding children's productive participation are highlighted and debated in many classic studies. From a structural point of view, it has been the dynamics of the economy, particularly in western societies, which shows the "invisible" or "disconnected" involvement of children in the labour market. Children's work has developed from being entirely focused and based on family interests, to extend these interests to the sphere of society, on what Qvortrup (2001) refers as the *oikos* –prevailing economy:

Among the peculiarities of the modern oikos –or rather how it is depicted in academic and political discourses– is that children are disconnected from it. In fact, this was the gist of Ariès' message about the birth of childhood. Both in popular imagery and in terms of legitimate claims, children are excluded from production and the division of labour; as consumers they merely have claims on their parents with whom they constitute a family but not oikos; and finally in terms of circulation they appear as objects rather than subjects – objects in the sense of raw material or potential human capital to be formed as future labour power without acknowledgment of the contributions they make while children (98).

So, as Qvortrup points out, it is important in observing how children's involvement in productivity has disengaged them from their capacity to participate consciously in decisions normally made by adult societies, so regulating the separation between productive-adult / unproductive-child.

With the regulation of the labour, through the optimisation of the skilled work force, and the introduction of compulsory education in developed countries, the demand on child labour has been affected in global terms. Some studies have concentrated on understanding the link between historical processes and the economic forces that influence the demand for child work. In studying the effects of those elements, it has been observed that socio-cultural differences over time and space are not isolated elements when determining the existence of child labour (Stephens 1995; Balagopalan 2002).

In the previous section, I discussed briefly the various approaches and historical trajectories of “childhood” studies of sociology and anthropology and the different theoretical stances related to the socialisation concept. My main concern here is to examine how anthropological approaches to the study of children and child work have been influenced by these conceptual differences and perspectives. However, to clarify the aims and objectives of this thesis and to justify the methodological approach, I need to discuss the diverse concepts of child work and, in particular, to define the meaning of work within the context of this research. This section also explores some definitions of work, labour, gender and their interrelationships within the central discussion of the thesis on child work as a constructive concept. The discussion revolves around the notion of *work* chosen instead of the term *labour* and the analytical and methodological reasons for doing so. Moreover, I review the set of different approaches taken in the research literature, to analyse the phenomenon of child work in the contemporary world, alongside the contribution of anthropological research to its understanding. Many studies of children’s work attempt to elucidate its social, economic and legal implications. Authors such as Bekombo (1981), Hull (1981), Reynolds (1991), Nieuwenhuys (1994), and Pscharopoulos (1997), take on an analytical approach when assessing the socio-economic logic underlying children’s contribution to household income and domestic welfare. Within this line of research there are a variety of approaches, namely:

1. Economic: developmental and educational approaches
2. Legal (including the abolitionist)
3. Demographic
4. Anthropologic and sociologic approaches within the traditional theoretical frameworks
5. Post-modern views

The following subsections review each of these briefly.

1.3.2 Economic approach

The economic approach contains a variety of models based on the contribution of children’s income within their household and its impact on large economies and adult labour markets (Bequele & Boyden 1988). It focuses on the economic causes and effects of child labour amongst the poorest families, mainly in developing countries

households (Green 1998: 15; Chartterjee 1992, 1997; Rodgers and Standing, 1981b: 37 Cogle & Tasker 1982, Rodgers & Standing 1981a.). For instance, the conventional model treats child work as a pragmatic household economic decision. Conventional models treat the household as a single decision-making unit (Becker 1964). A critical approach to this model suggests that decision making within the household depends on the bargaining power of all productive members. The distribution of decision-making power, however, is based on the wage of each labourer being integrated into the total income, which is weakened for all those members who contribute to intra-household activities (non-cash), thus weakening their bargaining power (Riley 1997). The latter model intends not only to take account of the economic realities of child work, but to influence regulatory policies towards education. Education policies tend to demonstrate that the real income contribution of the children to their household is not significant enough to keep children in the labour market, and place importance on their school attendance. This position has been criticised by some academics who believe school attendance can be compared to work because its investment by society and the family will be in full productive use in adulthood, or in what Qvortrup (2001) refers to as *diachronic division of labour* (110) (see also King 1982; Myers 1989, 1992; Wing 1995; Mayall 2002).

1.3.3 Developmental and educational approaches

Within the subdivision of the economics of child labour, development and educational studies play an important role in the research into child work¹⁰. Such approaches advocate a socio-economic investment by wealthy nations directed to the “poorer and weaker” in developing nations (Chambers 2004). The researchers concerned with the development approach argue that the impact of labour and work on children’s education negatively affects in the short and long term the productivity of the household and eventually in the development of national economies (Psacharopoulos & Arrigada 1989; Patrinos & Psacharopoulos 1997; Weiner 1991; Basu 1999; Kandel & Post 2003). This approach goes beyond the mere highlighting of the realities of child work. It aims to influence the policies which regulate child work in societies where the economic options are restricted by a series of legal and socio-cultural

¹⁰ Development approaches are of charitable nature, where the objective is to tackle material deprivation through funding local action groups (education health, agricultural production). The idea is predominantly to alleviate the symptoms rather than to look to the causes.

measures (*ibid.*). Researchers within this field believe that educational returns for society exceed the family gains from child work and justify its banning as a good interventionist strategy (Grootaert & Kanbur 1995).

1.3.4 The legal approach

The legal approach tends to tackle the issue from a sociological and a moral point of view, sustaining ideas such as “child work is an evil to be eliminated” from the contemporary world (Anti-Slavery Society 1983; Bequele and Boyden 1988; Cullen 1991; ILO 1999; Rogers & Swinnerton 2002; Silva 2002; and cf. Rodgers & Standing 1981b: v). The legal approach intends to regulate harmful forms of child labour. The aim is to understand and propose mechanisms to tackle poverty and child labour by designing educational programmes. Thus, it is directly related to the educational approach. Although every country already has legal or constitutional mechanisms to regulate it, international organisations, such as ILO¹¹, have enforced universal regulations not only to regulate, but also to ban the worst forms of child labour (ILO 1996, 1999). Arguing against this position, authors such as Dessy & Pallage (2005), propose an alternative economic model, the parental investment in children’s education. In essence, most of these models appear to advocate investment in human capital through the implementation of laws and welfare programmes to alleviate poverty, and thus to achieve the return of child labourers to school. Eventually, the desired outcome is the well being of the entire children’s family or ex-workers.

However, in a critical review, Ennew (1994) demonstrates how these legal efforts have impinged on local attitudes to work in less developed societies. Ennew’s proposal then, is that such efforts should lead eventually to a global and influential view of children’s rights (Shihata 1996; Van Bueren 1999; Aitken 2001). There are other elements that need to be taken into account, apart from the present state facts and the cultural perspectives of non-western societies, so as to achieve an improved understanding of the dynamics of how child work actually manifests itself in different cultures (Baker & Hinton 2001; Pierik & Houwerzij 2002). Only recently, organisations appear to be taking into account local belief systems and needs of

¹¹ The most recent regulatory convention approved by ILO, Convention 182, does not only intend to mark the age boundaries and types of work children may access for employment, but strongly recommends to all nations a total ban to the “worst forms of child labour”.

households in terms of their children being employed or engaged in working relationships (McKechnie & Hobbs 1997; Chowdhry & Beeman 2001; Myers 2001b, Brown et al. 2001; Invernizzi 2003; Leonard 2004). Some of these studies propose practical strategies to regulate child work in some social contexts where it might not be as visible as in other contexts, i.e., domestic paid work (Blagbrough & Glyn 1999). Thus, legislation and education schemes need to be redefined and tailored to the cultural and economic necessities of children in diverse societies, offering substantial *accessibility* to, rather than just *promoting equality* (Boyden 1998; Scott et al. 2000: 17).

1.3.5 The demographic approach

The demographic approach tends to analyse the problem of child work from a macro analytical view. It focuses on the mobility of populations between and within countries caused by localised needs for labour and, in general, fluctuations of labour demand and wider economic conditions. This analytical basis is also centred on the geographical distribution of resources, economic market opportunities and the ability of the poor communities to access them through their work. This access is usually achieved through migration. The mobility of adult workers often creates a gap in local economies which working children can exploit, thus providing a necessary income to households affected by the virtual absence of adults (Kenny 1997). This approach is heavily influenced by economic studies (Pacharopoulos et al. 1995; Ferraz 2003) on child labour, especially in developing economies. The allocation of the labour force as well as other issues, such as capacity utilisation (available work force) and geographic placements of production units for the maximisation of output and minimization of production costs are elements which influence political decisions. These decisions are inevitable, at both the macro and the micro levels, and affect all the members of the labour force, especially in less developed societies, eventually influencing delicate balances in informal sectors. The question is in terms of how flexible some specific economic areas are with respect to fertility and therefore child work demand within households. According to Alter (1992), the transition from high to low-fertility patterns from one generation to the next brings the adjustment to new patterns of social values i.e., as a symbol of prestige and economic wealth in the rural households, to an expensive object within contemporary urban societies.

However, in societies such as the developing ones these patterns create a series of economic adjustments where children are still of heavy economic value, while expected future generations will have lower rates of fertility and more integration within the urban lifestyle. Hollos (2002) for instance, found out that in a same society, such as the Pare in northern Tanzania, the patterns and values of child-rearing and household reproduction have changed in terms of fertility rates and marriage based families. This has been result of socioeconomic effects as migration and religion. For traditional families children are an important source of work prestige and future gains –materialistic view; whereas for nuclear partnerships the value towards children is of emotional fulfilment (ibid.: 185). In areas of significant out-migration, particularly during periods of financial crisis, child labour and child work may be intensified, as often being the sole means of household reproduction either in the original place of residence (Rees 1998; Estrada 1999; Cohen 2002; Hampshire forthcoming). However, with respect to the approach that favours children’s voices, it is difficult to ascertain in such cases to what degree child work is based on economic or socio-cultural factors, or both (LeVine 1994). From the above studies it appears that a household’s financial distress and the decision of children to work does not necessarily coincide with or imply the absence of non-economic factors that affect child work. In other words, there may be other non-economic causes besides poverty for the existence of child work: Causes such as geography, ethnic or cultural background, which do not exclude the presence of several other factors that predispose towards of working children i.e., rural traditions of work, local perceptions of children and work, ritual commitments of households within the community (Green 1998: 151; James et al. 1998; Hollos 2002: 187).

1.3.6 Classic theoretical frameworks within anthropology and sociology

Within anthropological and sociological studies of children, based on classic theoretical trends, the relevance of work is highlighted as an aspect of the socialisation of children (Williams 1983; Whiting 1988). Traditionally, the idea of work, as a socialising approach, was conceived as a key aspect of children’s developmental process towards adulthood and full integration into society. These studies stated that children acquire skills and social knowledge based on “learning by doing” (James 1983; Nieuwenhuys 1994; Boyden et al. 1998; Beegle et al. 2003;

Maybin & Woodhead 2003). More recently, anthropologists have turned their attention to developing countries, especially amongst the urban and rural poor (Hull 1981; Kenny 1997; Estrada 1999; Tracynski 2000). Many ethnographers differentiate between work at home, which is called “domestic help”, and paid employment which is often labelled as “exploitation” by child labour advocates¹² (Schlemmer 2000). Children’s chores at home are considered as complementary to adults’ work, and as contributing to household reproduction at a private level; whereas paid employment outside home is often interpreted as evidence of hierarchical labour relationships and differentiated poverty levels in the public domain (see for discussion Estrada 1999: 178; and Nieuwenhuys 1994: 205). For example, Schildkrout (1981) suggests that in countries where children do not enjoy productive roles, childhood is regarded as a “rehearsal” for adulthood. In such cases, most of the child’s activities are regarded as learning experiences. Child work in this point of view, is not entirely negative and unwelcome, as it becomes part of the wider educational framework offered by society, as well as the social networks developed between households, workshops or even with individuals (Bryant 1985; Samuelsson 1997).

1.3.7 Post-modern approaches

More recent studies including anthropological research within the post-modern framework are concerned with children’s *own views* (Baker 1998; Mizen et al. 2001; Hansen et al. 2001). In particular, some of these take into consideration the cultural ideas of childhood and work, and how these are experienced and performed on an everyday basis (i.e., White & Brinkerhod 1981; Nieuwenhuys 1994; Morrow 1995; Charterjee 1992; Kenny 1997; Punch 2000). Post-modern views endeavour to take into account the notions of the children themselves of the world around them and their actual participations in family and in various aspects of community life (Stephens 1995; Solberg 1997; Kjørholt 2002; Invernizzi 2003).

¹² According to this view, an exploitative relationship prevents children from creating the best conditions for their future. This view suggests that exploitative relationships can be observed in the domestic and non-domestic milieu. “The brutality of exploitation may be found within as much as outside the domestic environment. And the work performed by a child is not inevitably bound to be subject to unacceptable conditions outside as much as within the domestic environment (Schlemmer 2000: 10).

1.3.7.1 Constructionist and deconstructionist views¹³

In post modern approaches, authors such as Rex and Wendy Stainton Rogers (1989), Jenks (1982), James and Prout (1990) propose that childhood is a constructed concept that varies according to the narrative and the interpretations made of it, in a variety of cultural and historical contexts: “Childhoods are variable and intentional” (James et al. 1998: 27) criticising the notion of universality of the classical approaches to childhood.

The core of the discussion on children’s construction of ideas of work is based on analysing how the experience of work acquires significance in the way children develop their relationships with other agents (children and adults) and the contexts where those take place. Work, thus, is significant and valid to children themselves, but might be unacceptable in other socio-cultural contexts and historical developments in different and various communities, e.g., certain English contemporary societies (McKechnie & Hobbs 1997) or Indian fisher communities (Nieuwenhuys 1994). Thus, work takes its meaning when certain historical and geographical conditions somehow influence these relationships e.g., migration patterns due to the economic poverty or the ecological poverty of the agricultural lands.

So, some expressions of work are not necessarily comparable with those instituted by international organisations, which resort to conventional concepts to offer some understanding of the phenomenon of child work (Lee 2001). It is necessary to move away from the conventionalisms of this concept, which do not always explain the existence and value of work in particular communities.

This approach opens up the opportunity for children to manifest themselves as fruitful resources for study. However, there is not an established theoretical framework for comparative research into child work. This implies that although the interpretations of childhood under the constructionist point of view may be self-contained, it might be questioned the validity of the conclusions. In other words, it is not always possible to produce a robust and unifying concept of childhood for several practical and methodological reasons. Principally, children’s own accounts might provide entirely

¹³ Deconstructionist views intend to analyse concepts as to ‘expose hidden assumptions and preconceptions’ (Stainton Rogers W. 2003: 27).

different points of reference, not only between societies, but also within the same social groups or units. Hence, the researcher is left with the dilemma of which account to use as representative and how to benchmark different responses across similar groups. This is not only a communication problem, but a difficulty that arises from the different ways in which children conceptualise their position within their society and domestic units. Such obstacles can be overcome with careful modification of the research methodology and sensitive redefinitions of the crucial relevant concepts (according to the particular characteristics of every analytical unit and its social context, but not necessarily in contrast to existing research literature) (Gergen 1985: 14). Therefore, a balance is needed between the accounts of children and the research methodology to account for the diversity of the notions expressed by children on the same subject. This would enable the researcher to recognise common concepts about work and children's relationships, especially when rapport between researcher and children proves satisfactory. This point is integral to my study and will become more evident in the empirical chapters that will follow.

So far I have outlined the main approaches to child work, in order to illuminate the course that had led to the current understanding of this phenomenon. Each point of view has its own merits and limitations. For the purpose of this thesis, it is necessary to highlight the importance of the neoclassical approach, combined with a more post-modern view on social constructionism. Using these approaches, I will be analysing in the following chapters the fieldwork data. This will emphasise the relevant characteristics of child workers in the chosen area of study, and demonstrate important aspects in their everyday relationships. These relationships include socialisation patterns and negotiation strategies demonstrated by the children's accounts. A further objective is to observe how these strategies compare with those of other household members, in the chain of survival activities over time, in intergenerational relationships. Most of these approaches, which in various ways have contributed to the development of the understanding of children as a unit of analysis in social science, also have followed classical patterns of understanding¹⁴.

¹⁴ Deconstructionist approaches analyse the conventional concepts that define social phenomena from a critical point of view, where taken for granted concepts are put into question (Gergen 1999)

1.3.8 Child work, worldwide views

1.3.8.1 Western influence on child work ideas

Based on the conviction that children are vulnerable and dependent within the “dominant ideology” (cf. Jenks 1996; McKechnie & Hobbs 1997; Zornado 2001), in recent times, western legislation has endeavoured to moderate and protect the development of children. As a consequence of legal advances, the regulatory framework for child labour, combined with the efforts to consolidate economies in poor nations, have penetrated the core of family life and reproduction.¹⁵ According to Hopkins (1994: 6), public efforts to regulate and to eliminate child labour were an outcome of Europe’s middle class struggles and philanthropic concerns, as well as feelings of pity towards the working classes in their own countries. These expressions of public concern were evidence of middle class eagerness to extend its control into the family lives of the poor (Nieuwenhuys 1996). Moreover, these efforts reinforced the moral dichotomies and social values inherited from the nineteenth-century positivism. The regulation of secular life in the recent history of the European and North-American societies has, nevertheless, influenced the public, political and institutional views in on how children should be confined to the realm of the family and school (Cunningham 1991; Hopkins 1994).¹⁶

1.3.8.2 Conventions and notions about child work and child labour

Conventional [classical] models that advocate for the promotion of legal measures, mainly promoted by international organizations, do not always share common socio-cultural and economic elements in their approach, i.e., International Labour Organisation (ILO). There is a tendency to disregard the historical differences by examining societies under a generalised scheme (Balagopalan 2002). Hence, there is

¹⁵ James (1983) offers an excellent review and discussion about the concept of childhood in recent times. Gittins (1998) devotes a chapter which refers not only to the historical context of the debate, but also to the contemporary theoretical approaches that have contributed to later postmodernism.

¹⁶ It was through the process of recognition of children’s work that childhood became recognised as different from adulthood (Cunningham 1991: 65). Gradually, adults started forming very strong and restrictive beliefs on what was suitable for the children, notions usually reflected by the contemporary legislation. Eventually the independence children gained during the industrial revolution, faded after the First World War. Children were confined to schools; however some illegal forms of child work still prevailed (McKelway, A. J. 1906).

dissociation between what these models were designed to address and what they promote. The deconstruction of the concept of child worker/labourer is pertinent here (opposed to as non-productive). In this case, at the empirical level, the realities are disengaged as experiences of working children worldwide are not uniform. This level of conventionalism attempts to integrate which, in general, are believed to be applicable (Gendreau 2000). However they may not be useful, relevant or pertinent in all situations. The mere existence of valued productive activities by children from themselves and their communities simply erodes the conventional idea of children as non-productive (cf. Gergen 1999: 24-29). However, more recently, international organisations have striven to take into account the multicultural worlds in which children live (Goodnow and Wharton 1991; LeVine et al. 1994; James & James 2001; Regt 2004).

The creation of the International Labour Office (ILO 1999) in 1919 and the formation of UNICEF after the Second World War have contributed to the world wide recognition that children have special needs and should have rights (UNICEF 1997). Standardised requirements about work have been set up as, for example, the maximum age of childhood and the minimum age to work. Moreover, international governments have signed agreements for the regulation of children's working conditions, but many of these have not been implemented, mainly because these are based on Western hegemonic ideology and take for granted the Occidental view of the well-being of children. In general, there is a lack of understanding of the social, cultural and particular historical aspects of childhood, as Nieuwenhuys suggests (op. cit.):

[...] It is the identification of working children with this higher Western ideal of separate childhood in school that today makes work in the context of the family not only bearable, but contributes to isolate and restrict children's economic opportunities (26).

The official UN definition states that "a child is recognised as a person under eighteen, unless national laws recognise the age of majority earlier."¹⁷ Age has been a further limiting factor in separating children from any kind of work experience

¹⁷United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Green 1998:210).

beyond the household socialisation. Age is a partial boundary between the institutional personhood and the dependency of children without political rights or acknowledgment. For most countries 18 years is the age when citizenship is recognised and access is opened to civil rights. It is clear that by international agreement of the adult political spheres, *a child is not a citizen and therefore he or she lacks any kind of citizenship* (Ennew 1994: 10). However, this often clashes with various local cultural views and practices (Kjorhol 2002) For instance, a strong definitive pattern of childhood within some developing societies, such as in Kerala, India, regards children as being able to combine school and work in order to enjoy a better standard of living (Nieuwenhuys 1994; Green 1998). In these societies, children are not regarded as passive members of the household. In their everyday performances they attempt to reconcile their local traditions with the hegemonic impositions from the national state and international institutions such as the United Nations, UNICEF and the ILO. This is also the case amongst some poor people in industrialised countries (Middleton & Loumidis 2001: 24; Hansen et al. 2001; Ingenhorst 2001). In both settings harsh working conditions and misrecognition of labour rights prevail¹⁸ (Nieuwenhuys 1994; Green 1998).

There is substantial amount of recent economic literature, concerned not only with the welfare of children and economies in developing countries, but also with the issue of sustainable development and improvement of standards of life. As far as anthropological research is concerned, there is a need to clarify where labour stops and work begins, and where are the children's boundaries to access future opportunities not only based in globalising views, but on their own sociocultural contexts (Goldson et al. 2002; Baker 1998; Traczynski 2000)

¹⁸ Differences of children's work between developed and developing societies diverge within the goals and objectives. Children in developed societies' tend to employ themselves in order to obtain extra-cash to fulfil their consuming needs (Ingerhost 2001: 141). Children in developing societies on their part are usually employed to fulfil collective needs, either of the household or the community (Punch 2001; my own ethnographic notes 2000). Poverty is not necessarily the motive for children to work in other specific cultural contexts. However, as seen from ethnographic evidence, poverty is a relative term which also implies that child (and their parents) may desire to obtain commodities that middle class children in their own countries may obtain through the income of the parents.

1.3.8.3 The concepts of child labour and child work in social science disciplines

With respect to the objectives of this thesis, the focal point is on *children that work*, not only on children that are *involved in a productive relationship that reflects adult conditions* (Estrada 1999). I am primarily concerned with the work that allows them to participate in their own survival, even when this coincides with the household reproductive activities. In this section I present the main reasons why I have chosen the term *work* over *labour*, despite that the latter is implicit in the former. I prefer to use the term “work” (or occupation) in order to describe children’s experiences *while doing something productive*, and in this way, contribute to domestic reproduction, which necessarily includes domestic and paid activities. According to James (1983), children are always active, and work classifies as a valued child activity. Hence, child work is not an alien aspect to children’s everyday lives (Boyden 1998). Work, however, as other contemporary concepts, must not be taken for granted as a permanent or singular concept.

According to Grint (1998), work is a constructed term and thus differs from society to society, from class to class and in terms of gender, age and ethnic origin. The conventional use of the term, which detaches it from the relational term of paid work, does not support alternative manifestations of productive activity (Grint 1998, 29). Not all kinds of productivity necessarily entail the exchange of cash, or have a cash value, but might fulfil a material necessity and at the same time are intended to assist the individual’s reproductive needs, in this case the household’s.¹⁹ So work has to be considered from the effort involved in producing to this end, more than in terms of cash contribution (Lloyd and Gage-Brandon 1993: 125). The use of the term *work* implies a broader definition than that which covers the imperceptibility of children’s natural activities within the domestic sphere, and also those which take place outside and could be considered illegal or unsuitable for children. I follow the definition suggested by Boyden et al. (1998) about work, which is relevant to the aim of this thesis: “Working children” are *those in paid employment, or active in money-making tasks inside or outside the home, or involved in unpaid home maintenance, for at least*

¹⁹ “[...] the image of work as separate from unrelated to the home, and the associated predominance of male breadwinners is both historically atypical and theoretically vacuous: home and the place of work have always been, and still are, intimately connected by the seamless web of social interdependence” (Grint 1998: 46).

ten hours per week (Boyden et al. 1998: 22). Though it remains the uncertain element of “ten hours per week” as criteria to define “work” for children, which may be subject to households’ and children’s own definitions, this definition still opens the opportunity to analyse my own empirical data.

Work around the house and paid work is structured to accomplish the fulfilment of survival in a direct relation to the domestic division of work, where authority and power relationships take place (Lloyd & Gage-Brandon 1993; Salazar 1998). Consequently, the allocation of work (with productive or reproductive purposes) is usually controlled by adults, and particularly by women (Chant 1991).²⁰ It becomes mandatory to contribute to household survival as part of the way household structures according to gender, age and the way family hierarchies and the socioeconomic context (Nieuwenhuys 1996).

Pahl (1984: 42) suggests, when regarding the historicity of work, which wage-based labour is not only a result of industrialisation and the gender division of labour in a particular period, but also its existence precedes these events. A form of wage labour as complementary for the productive work of the domestic units is evident in medieval peasant seasonal work (Marx 1973). Such characteristic activities still can be observed in developing economies (Salazar 1996; Estrada 1999), where industrialised labour is combined with low skill hired work in agriculture (Arias 1992).

The term *work* carries a richer context with respect to relationships and negotiations as it includes also non-economic dynamics. It allows for a better understanding and interpretation of the kind of relationships children are able to negotiate. Thus, *work* is more suitable as a flexible term, rather than *labour*. Negotiating their position in a work context is expressed in what children do, not only to survive, but also to obtain advantages in a usually unfavourable environment (referring to the household or the workplace) (see also Kenny 1997; Solberg 1997: 127).

²⁰ Chant (1991) argues that in Latin American countries for instance, female headship is more widespread than theory suggests and that certain socio cultural and economic factors contribute to its existence. Immigration patterns, low wages and “failure of men to live up to cultural expectations” (as provider and protector of the family), play a decisive role in a marginalised situation for men to ultimately leave their families (Chant 1991: 21), and for these to engaged in the informal labour markets.

In conclusion, the reference to *work* in this thesis is realised as the collection of perceptions and experiences of children expressed in every day life and not solely within labour relationships. Thereby, children's work entails a more complex problem which needs to be assessed at its core by questioning the very definitions of work put forward by social scientists. This approach aims to take into consideration children's own cultural perceptions of how they are able to express themselves in everyday relationships, focused on their continued existence, while aiming to achieve a better position, even if this offers marginal advantages. This, nevertheless, encompasses further research as a constructive way of contributing to the knowledge on children as a cross-cultural analytical unit. To complete the study, I need to refer to the institutional content of labour as a recurrent concept in the literature. This will be examined below.

1.3.9 The importance of understanding children's accounts of working experiences

One of the most valuable approaches in terms of recognizing the divergences between work and labour is the one that associates labour with adulthood, whereas work results from a series of activities which children learn by imitating adults (Myers 2001a: 3). As James states, western society has removed and separated children from the adult world, by forbidding them to work in the labour sphere (James 1983: 215). Child-adult dichotomies arise when it comes to discussion about the boundaries of work and labour, as is shown in what is regarded as the suitability of child work in rich industrialised societies. Social ethics are often seen to impose certain judgemental attitudes towards children working. Myers asserts, in empirical terms that *work* is not harmful *per se* (2000: 5). Cultural values and tradition provide a set of boundaries within which certain activities (including child work) obtain a positive value, not always compatible with contemporary western beliefs.²¹

The reason why children's work is so difficult to grasp in its cultural manifestations is that it cannot be judged alone by economic criteria i.e., poverty, as suggested by ILO for example, as it responds to complex socio-economic and cultural realities. For

²¹ There is evidence that child work in peasant European societies was a common practice up to the 1950s. In the United States is still possible to find family farms that rely in children's work in order to be productive (Kim & Zepeda 2004)

instance, Green (1998: 57) argues that many lower class children of Latin America work not only out of necessity, but also to satisfy their self-esteem by contributing to their families' income. Amongst the children born in families working in domestic textile workshops, children are keen to work without payment because they are aware of the economic value of their contribution, and because they are acknowledged in adults' discourse (Rodriguez-Cazares 1998).

In contrast to the ILO's approach, Schildkrout (1981: 89) defined work as "*any activity done by children which either contributes to production, gives adults free time, facilitates the work of others, or substitutes for the employment of others*". This statement, although more attuned to social realities, still does not take into account children's perceptions and how relationships are shaped by other aspects of cultural life. Work is seen as a static topic, independent of everyday identity negotiations. By contrast, James (1983:94) and Baker (1998: 48) argue that children build their identities by performing productive activities on a daily basis. In this way, they reproduce and reconcile the structures imposed by the wider society within the interests of the family and their own feelings.²²

For James (1993), work has generally been stigmatised because it has been conceived as inappropriate to the healthy development and socialisation of children. This position is held by many scholars (Carsten 1992: 22; Bloch 1992: 78; Porter Poole 1992: 185; Whiting 1963, 1988; Williams 1983). According to them, children do not fit well into the adult world if they diverge from the western social norms regarding children's upbringing. Children are psychologically and biologically immature individuals who during childhood, go through various stages. During those stages, they learn by imitation, learn the accepted norms of society and participate in the rites of passage, which ultimately lead to socially recognised adulthoods.

When children work, it is not seen as having the same status as adults' activities. The latter's is seen as positive and rewarding. The chasm is based on biological features and morality. James (1993) highlights the dichotomy between child-play and work,

²² "A comprehensive study of children at work should identify how children accumulate practical knowledge of the conventions drawn upon in the production and reproduction of social interactions. Much of an individual's knowledge is carried practical consciousness which consists of all the things which actors know tacitly about to 'go on' in the context of social life without being able to give them direct discursive expression" (Giddens, quoted in Reynolds, 1991: xxviii).

between adults and children.²³ However, this is not always observed in all societies (Reynolds 1991; Nieuwenhuys 1996; McKchnie & Hobbs 1997; Green 1998). For instance, according to Lloyd & Gage-Brandon (1993), the value of work among some Ghanan families can be considered from a broad perspective which does not solely consider cash contributions: ‘...we define work contribution to the household in terms of effort rather than in terms of productivity or income.’ (ibid.: 125). From these perspectives it is possible then to regard children’s contributions as valuable to the survival of households even when their work does not always equal a cash value (see also Goodnow 1988).

1.3.9.1 Child work, the intricate relationship between children, household and work

Classic anthropology has researched children’s work usually within a very domestic sphere i.e., in terms of family and their daily activities, kinship and the rituality of children’s participation between both age and gender (Narotzky 1985; Whiting 1988; Punch 2000; Leyra Fatou 2003), and even when generational and birth position are taken into account (Punch 2001). Economic anthropology has aimed at determining the characteristics of peasant and urban households in order to depict their productive and reproductive features (Calva, 1993; Estrada 2000). In some Latin American countries for instance (Myers 1989; Salazar 1998; Green 1998; Pilotti 1999), the peasant work has been replaced by activities performed in urban environments, many of them far different from that at the fields and the *ranchos* (ranchs) (Arias 1992). Today fathers, mothers and children are actively engaged in work and wage based activities, which are performed in the house, the street, the markets, workshops, and in factories. Some of the work is performed at home by women or men in order to be with the family and look after the younger children, old people or the ill members (Hansen 2001). The domestic activities carried out by children have a great importance in maintaining not only the reproduction of the unit, but its continuity as a whole and its relative equality.

²³“Children are sent ‘out to play’ by their parents; play is considered to be their legitimate sphere of activity. Adults work, they participate in a specific action sphere; hence, the stigma of unemployment. When asked what they are doing, children reply, ‘playing’, adults reply ‘working’ [...]” (James 1993: 216).

In Latin America the 20th century's massive immigration movements produced a rich sociological field to explore (Clark et al. 2004). For instance, for immigrants, the equality in sharing and organising the work of the domestic units in some rural places such as e.g., Oaxaca in Mexico, or reorganizing it according to federal change of law in the possession of the rural property, meant to be the only solution to find new economic means and to adapt to new social environments (De Teresa 1991). Elements such as the urban economy, social values and morals have influenced the views and traditional values of the formerly rural families. One of these elements that affect equality is wage labour and the re-conceptualisation of work by its performers. Work in the cities is seen by rural immigrants as a necessity and the only way to subsist. Children learn how to position themselves in this “new” work relationship within the urban area in order to negotiate and obtain a new position in their domestic groups. Children learn to identify with the modern parameters of childhood, as opposed to work (Nieuwenhuys 1996: 244). Nowadays children share their time between school, work and play. Gradually, children's work is viewed as an anomaly by many outsiders and a few insiders. Children are constantly learning about these external views and consequently negotiate new positions within the household, their peers and the people with whom they work (Solberg 1997; James et al. 1998). The ambivalence of children's work in this environment provides another way of conceptualising work. The transition from the peasant existence to the urban dwelling affects the children's lives. From their accounts, both written and oral, valuable insights can be obtained on their productive participation and socialisation in their urban environment including the work sphere (Baker 1998; Salazar 1998; Traczynski 2000; Iversen 2002).

1.3.10 Work as socialisation

In many societies, work is seen often as a positive and necessary experience in the growing up process. Anthropology has adopted the above approach regarding it as a socialisation process (James 1983; Whiting 1983; Regt 2004). Work experience is valued as a positive asset for children (Goodman 1970: 65), whereas labour is associated with “exploitation” and neglect²⁴. (Cullen 1991). However, in strict terms,

²⁴ I have chosen to exclude the term “exploitation” due to its ideological implications and the moral images it has generated in non-academic literature and some political groups (Anti-slavery groups such as the “Global March” in Nepal). Exploitation entails not only the deprivation of proper labour conditions for children as a negative aspect, but it is placed in a regulatory or preventive line, which

labour is work that has been affected by the historical and cultural judgment of Euro-American societies (Myers 2001a: 4). According to the discussion, from a sociological and anthropological perspectives children's work can be considered in two different ways: 1) as part of the productive and reproductive activities, which emphasises the economic roles of the household members more than their cultural ones; 2) as part of the process of growing up or socialisation, which sees work as an essential activity in the economic experience of growing up. In the first approach, children's and women's work (also important for many feminist studies e.g., Bandinter 1985; Scheper-Hughes 1987; Nava 1992) is important for the continued existence of the household and offers the best subsistence elements for a future generation. According to ethnographical data such as Nieuwenhuys (1994), Schildkrout (1981), Kenny (1997), Reynolds (1991) and other authors have shown, this kind of work is not consciously appreciated by the rest of the household members. The second approach, which Nieuwenhuys (1996) refers to as neoclassical, depicts children's work as part of their process of becoming adults. Learning at home or at school becomes compulsory part of a children's existence. The knowledge achieved is focused onto the future (Jenks 1996), not for their current existence.²⁵ Any kind of work disrupting school is considered exploitative and degrading even though many children struggle to obtain some resources that will certainly allow them to pay school expenses (Nieuwenhuys 1994; Green 1998; Basu 1999).

does exclude the understanding of the phenomenon in its context. It overlooks, radically, the children's opportunity to work which for them and their families in many socio-cultural contexts may be dignifying. Also, exploitation entails the sub-value of the real productivity of the worker, which in the case of this thesis does not necessarily apply in all cases. Children working at home or in part time jobs or within the community working places do not always engage in "exploitative relationships" but in necessary activities within the distribution and allocation of domestic and reproductive work. This, however, does not exclude exploitative relationships in other working environments where children are underpaid or ill-treated by the employers, but it would be misleading to encapsulate all working experiences under the label of exploitative.

²⁵ Norma Field (1995) offers an interesting study of Japanese children that are suffering from the loss of their childhood, which was observed through what is considered children's activities i.e., school. The worries of achieving the best performance aggravate children's health and exhibits symptoms identified with adult's nervous illnesses such as stress, ulcers, baldness, etc. This socialisation and education process has become equal, by its harshness, to adults' labour. It shows how socialisation and formal education has extracted the element of immaturity and child focus from a stage that was supposed to be free of the adult concerns.

1.4 The experience of child work and the generational changes in relationships among household members: The importance of structure and agency concepts.

The importance of child work in marginal communities and the anthropological interest surrounding it has persuaded researchers to approach the issue from many different angles. Initially, the emphasis was on domestic reproduction; however, lately more importance has been attributed to observing the economic and socio-cultural effects of child productivity (Boyden 1991; Field 1995; Gootaert et al. 1995; Leyra Fatou 2003; Mackinnon 2003), while recognising the validity of children's own accounts towards it (Solberg 1998: 2001; Woodhead 1999). Structural and agency approaches have been used to assess the impact of child work in cross-cultural studies, and although structural studies tend to be integral to the socio-cultural and family contexts, agency-based studies integrate the actors' point of view (Ibid, Larson 2004) through diverse methodologies (Benthall 1992; Woodhead 1999b).

1.4.1 Structure and agency

Traditional studies of child work in developing societies are very limited in identifying what is "observable" and conceived as domestic help rather than work, and usually form the bulk of family studies. The strategies for survival in a poor urban context are favoured subjects for household economy studies (Lewis 1969; Lomnitz 1975; Haguette 1982; Goddard and White 1982; Chant 1991; Gonzalez de la Rocha 1995). Although children are present in these studies, the main objective is to explain the dynamics of domestic economy, rather than children's own economic and socio-cultural status. According to Kenny (1997), most of these studies privilege the status of adults as wage earners, taking for granted, in a naturalistic way, the role of children as income contributors in conditions of poverty. Some studies focus on children's economic contribution in their own right (Salazar 1988; Guillen-Marroquin 1988; Kurczyn 1995; Duncan 1998; Ortiz Nahon 1999; Estrada 1999; Punch 2000; Traczynski 2000). However, part of their contribution is still focused on locating the dynamics of child work in terms of its economic role and social integration, rather than to contextualise the analysis in terms of children's notions within various relationships and particular social contexts (Qvortrup 1994; Nieuwenhuys 1994; James et al. 1998; Christensen & James 2000).

Another aspect of these studies is that they tend to be limited in their understanding of the variety of childhood notions in the diversity of socio-cultural worlds. I believe, as some other researchers do (James et al. 1998; Jenks 1996; Mayall 2003; Lee 2001; Stainton Rogers 2003) that defining the concept of childhood goes hand in hand with understanding other social phenomena. Hence, the difficulties in grasping a comprehensive notion of childhood and work in particular contexts makes existing studies appear vague. They seem to employ epistemological shortcuts, where the interest is placed on ways of reducing poverty and not necessarily in understanding the complex socio-cultural spectrum of domestic living conditions and struggles for existence. Hence, much contemporary research into domestic economies tends to place emphasis on child labour while child work plays a more minor role (Arenal 1991).

Generally speaking, in developing countries, when the issue is centred on child work rather than child labour, the tendency is to overemphasise the socialisation element as a determinant of children in society (Parsons 1951; Bekombo 1981; cf. Hobbs et al. 1999; Hansen et al. 2001). This downward structuralism (Archer 1995: 81) delineates children as mere additive elements of the structuring of society. The element of “agency” is completely alien to this approach. Agency is diluted in the name of co-dependence and *social structuration* (Giddens 1984). Studies based on quantitative methods present a partial account of specific children’s realities. The statistical data offered in quantitative studies offer a sense of anonymity and lack of agency to the actors, limiting attempts to generate a more realistic depiction of particular social phenomena (Nieuwenhuys 1994; Qvortrup 1997; James et al. 1998).

The incorporation of children’s accounts has provided a novel perspective on the studies of child work/labour. Integral analyses allow the researcher to place children within their socio-cultural context, including the economic and historical forces that influence its existence (Stephens 1995). This analysis does not intend only to offer an account of the economic or cultural conditions in which child work takes place, but also to investigate the way children’s experiences are meaningful when structuring the dynamics of their own world within their social context (James et al. 1998: 119). This provides an opportunity to explore how children’s beliefs, values and attitudes towards work and their implications reach beyond economic and socialisation factors.

This approach is rendered more useful and effective as these factors although essential, do not solely explain the phenomenon (Morrow 1994). Elements such as age, gender and generation that have been studied are relevant when accounting for the importance of children's productive role. Taking into account these categories improve our understanding of children's participation in the work sphere not merely as a utilitarian or exploitative activity, but as a cultural one, and historically situated (Nieuwenhuys 1994, 1996; Delap 2001; Balagopalan 2002). Thus, child work is constructed in diverse ways, which depend on the interplay of the socio-cultural and historical elements discussed earlier, in particular sociocultural milieus.

1.4.2 Age, gender and generation

Differences in age, gender and generation have been influential and determining factors in the understanding of childhood (James et al. 1998; Lee 2003; Gittins 1998; Jenks 1997; Mayall 2002; Nieuwenhuys 1994). All of these analytical variables provide a distinction between adults and children and between men and women. These variables are also observable at an empirical level have to study as source of household contradictions when limiting the access to resources and opportunities within the household and the local labour markets (Nieuwenhuys 1994: 15, 17). By understanding these variables in developing societies it is possible to grasp some of children's notions of their own work (see also Reynolds 1991: 66). As Nieuwenhuys points out, children involved in domestic work or rural occupations tend to have negative ideas of their own contributions to the sustainability of their livelihoods (ibid.: 23). Whereas in western societies such as in the UK these variables tend to be standardised, and therefore children placed as a single category, in what is believed facilitates the access and provision of resources to the family (Mayall 2002: 49). In Germany something similar has been observed, where the politics of national spending strive to take into account children's education as part of economic investment for children or human capital, resulting in future positive socio-economic results (Qvtroupe 2001).

Age has been typically the chronological social category that acts as a boundary between children and adults among western societies, which in other cultures has to be taken as a relative concept (Nieuwenhuys 1994; Baker 1998; Salazar 1998). Within this distinction, there are certain expected roles not always replicated in daily lives.

Biological age does not necessarily correspond to cultural considerations of age in different societies, which might confer “age” an arbitrary status (see Caputo 1995; Levine 1998). In societies such as the British (Lee 2001) or the middle class of the Latin American countries (Green 1998) age is conceived in terms of “opposite” categories as describing each other e.g., authority and subordinates in parent-child relationships. According to Baker, who discusses the concept of age among the Nepalese rag-pickers, children themselves prefer to be referred to as “*khatas*” or the children living in the streets of Kathmandu away from their families. The concept of age typically provides a separation for the notion of “being” (adult) and “becoming” (children becoming adults) (Lee 2001: 137).

Generation, according to Mayall (2002) is an important variable that in previous studies was neglected, but is a “key concept to understand childhood” (Mayall 2002: 35). Notions about childhood go hand in hand with historical moments, where particular values shape and influence past and present generations of children (Balagopalan 2002). The generation concept also highlights the “temporal discrepancies between children and adults’ identities” (James et al. 1998: 66-67), while defining common elements between generations that share spatial and historical experience. Generational differences, according to Garcia & Hernandez (1992) can be conceived as notions which imply how every cohort comprehends their own world and respective meanings: ‘[Generational difference] is reflected in their separate perspectives that lend meaning to personal values and practices’ (ibid.:8).

In the debate about children’s work, gender differences are mainly discussed with regard to domestic work. It is a point of common knowledge and an issue studied by the feminists scholars, that girls are brought up to become housewives, whereas boys are encouraged to behave as future breadwinners (Goddard 1985; Chant 1991; Salazar 1998). However, as Visser (2002) points out, gender as other concepts treated in here, is another constructed concept, which varies between cultures. In this sense, Lorber (1994) for instance, states that gender permeates every aspect of social life:

[Gender] establishes patterns of expectations for individuals, orders the social processes of everyday life, is built into the major social organizations of society,

such as the economy, ideology, the family and the politics, and is also an entity in and of itself(1).

Gender has been a variable, a normative issue, which regulates and determines the diverse activities household members carry out. The difference between what is normative and what actually happens has been observed empirically in diverse cultures (Nash & Safa 1980; Chant 1991; Lloyd & Gage-Brandon 1993; Gonzalez de la Rocha 1994; Miles 1994). This creates conflict between rules on gender and the everyday authority patterns within the household: women are most of the time in control of what is produced and allocated (Lloyd & Gage- Brandon 1993: 117). This does not rest power to men's authority, but in many cases creates conflict, making households vulnerable to the economic changes of their societies, being children the most exposed: i.e., to abandon school and intensify their income contribution. The household has been conceived of as a strongly gendered place where tasks are distributed accordingly between men and women (James et al. 1998: 55). Girls and boys are expected to learn and replicate roles and assigned activities, which are believed will introduce them to adulthood. However, as I will show, these marked differences in adulthood are so determining when children participate in social relationships and especially when they express their own notions. They are also able to use their experience to relate to other people and circumstances and make the best of it: i.e., when girls in fostered homes contribute with domestic chores without being asked, an action that expresses her awareness of the 'necessity' of helping their families. Children's relationships overlap in many directions being gender an important one that strongly influences them (Mayall 2002: 28).

According to Gittins (1998: 186) the term "child" is masked under a gender biased notion of maleness: a child is generally conceived as a boy, and girls are rendered invisible. This is conducive to the dismissal and disregard of domestic chores as work because it is mostly considered a women's occupation. On the one hand, it has been pointed out that amongst poor families there is a continuum in the development of girls who keep on doing the same domestic activities throughout their lives without a break and ritual celebration of their coming of age. Simply, in urban and rural poor families, girls are burdened by tradition and customary gender tasks (Gittins 1998; Estrada 1999; De Teresa 1991; Nieuwenhuys 1994). On the other hand, boys are

stereotypically placed in a positive category of masculinity. They are perceived as part of the public space and only occasionally perform domestic chores, whereas girls are constrained to remain at home. For instance, from a very young age, girls are expected to look after their siblings, while boys are only expected to help out when there is no woman around to do it (Whiting 1988: 223). Most feminist scholars see in this a sign of the ideological invisibility of women and their exploitation in domestic life (Chatterjee 1992; Collier and Yanagisako 1987; Levison 2000). Other authors, by contrast, highlight the positive valuation of women's activities. Nieuwenhuys (op. cit.: 135), for instance, points out that among Muslim girls from the south of India, the collective making of "coir yarn" help them create networks of solidarity and also provide an important source of income and status.²⁶

1.4.3 Social networks of children

As it has been observed in other studies (Baker 1998, Song 2001), migrant children occupy a primary role in adapting to the new social context. Children do not only participate bridging the host and the original cultures, but play an active role in integrating adults into the customs, norms and believes that facilitate adaptation to a new world (Song 2001).

Social networks consist of a group of actors among whom there are certain relationships (Ramirez et al. 2004: 176). These relationships allow actors to establish communication, emotional and material support (Bryant 1985; Samuelsson 1997). Taking then into account the agency characteristics of children, it is possible to study how this traits allows them to maintain or establish social networks for their well being and that of their households.

In engaging more actively to society, children also participate in reproducing and establishing or generating new social networks, as a way to provide support and as a strategy against any negative effects in family relationships (Samuelsson 1997). Social networks act as a mechanism to facilitate participants their entrance to a new society, (Degenne & Lebeaux 2005; Borges 2003), and increase individuals' social capital implying the occupational market, education and livelihood in general (Raider

²⁶ The making of coir yarn in Poomkara in India is a female activity which allows to the poor families to complete the household income.

& Burt 1996; Sandefur & Laumann 1998; Seibert et al. 2001). So, social networks interlock institutions brought from original communities with the new societies' institutions to allow people, usually immigrant to strengthen an adapted social structure (Lomnitz 1975: 3).

Social networks act as to accommodate and support individuals within certain relationships: e.g., work, kinship. In the absence of a systematic welfare system in poor countries, social networks become essential (see also Bost et al. 1994). It does not only shelter and accommodate individuals in need of material and emotional support, but also it allows them to engage into a diverse set of relationships with adults and children alike, within a social system (Barrera 1986; Belle et al. 1989; Cochran 1990). The mechanisms in which social networks are structured vary according to the society and its beliefs (see also Borges 2003).

As children in my sample were active income providers, it was possible to observe the dynamics in which they were involved in creating or recreating social networks. As it has been observed in other studies, children's participation in social networks vary according to their age and gender (Samuelson 1997). According to Bryan (1985) as boys approach puberty, they seem to be more strongly involved in social networks through friends and peers sharing the same-kind of activities, e.g., belonging to the same basket-ball team. Byran (ibid.) as well as other authors suggest that this obey to the nature of children's relationships. Girls tend to be more emotionally attached to their friends and therefore engage in more intense relationships, whereas boys tend to have more widespread networks than girls (Waldrop & Halverson 1975; Tietjen 1982). However, in another study conducted by Bost et al. (1994), it was found that girls tended to acquire more social networks than the boys which included relatives, peers and other adults (Bryant 1985; Furman & Buhrmester 1985; Tiejten 1982). These differences are related to other variables apart from gender and age, to more geographical, socio-economic and even racial factors (Belle 1989; Cochran & Ridley 1990; Bost et al. 1994). Understanding social networks allows the researcher to comprehend the impact these liaisons have over the actors (Kirke 2005), which in some cases can be seen as having positive or negative effects on the well being of the individuals involved in determined social processes, i.e., entering school (Scharf & Hertz-Lazarowitz 2003; Ramirez et al. 2004).

Children's social networks are an ideal social element that allows the researcher to study not only children's aptitudes to relate to other individuals in society, but also to acknowledge their ability to mobilise their own social resources in order to obtain short and long term benefits for him/her and their families.

1.4.4 Relational processes

History plays an important role in understanding the implications of child work. These can vary through time and, also, differ from one generation to the next. In analysing the generational changes on childhood notions, Mayall (2002) developed the concept of *generation* to study differences and relationships between children's and adults' experiences and accounts of childhood in English schools. The historical variable has two dimensions: it supports the analysis of childwork in households where there are generational differences, while in the social context it observes how these influence the household members' interpretations and relationships (cf. Balagopalan 2002).

The importance of individual experiences of work account as to reflect the socio-cultural context and economic factors in the way roles are determined. Experiences are also relevant in the light of daily relationships and the way they differ from expected roles (Gergen 1994; Mayall 2002). When referring to *relational processes*, the intention of this study is to show how children regard work in the context of the everyday relationships, in order to deal with the limitations and opportunities presented by their environment. Within this perspective, children do not justify their work only as their contribution to the survival of their household. That work²⁷ has an importance in its own right, as part of children's identity, renders it relevant to my discussion of the significance of children's participation in the dynamics of their household's organisation, while interacting with the other family members' values system regarding work. In other words, there is a dynamic interaction between children and their notion of work that manifests itself within the household, which is influenced by existing values and practices, and guides the relationships while at the same time, being subject to them. However, my approach enables me to have an insight into the situation through my own observations. The negotiation of children's

²⁷ Work according to my approach is a constructed concept that has been formulated through children's own accords and views of themselves, from my observations as well as other empirical studies.

statuses and roles, through social networks and within the household reproductive and productive activities, provides the opportunity to analyse how children in this relational process are able to take part in decision making processes. Thus, I am able to maintain a dialectic point of view in understanding the phenomenon of child work, while observing relational processes which integrate generational aspects as structural and individual responses (agency).

By reconciling both structure and agency approaches (Archer 1998), the aim is to achieve an integrative analysis. This does not only explain the phenomenon of child work for a particular society, as a constructed concept, but offers the opportunity to show the actors' understanding of the structural forces and their interplay in their situation and time scale (ibid.). According to Archer, through the dual analysis of structure and agency, it is possible to understand the actual *interplay* of historical and contextual elements. Contrary to what Giddens (1979: 69) proposes for his *structuration theory*, these two elements are not mutually dependent, but are ontologically though not artificially separated, as Archer proposes (1998). Instead, what the morphogenetic approach²⁸ contends is that agents and structure determine each other in a time continuum. An historical perspective (history) plays a determining role in generating social action, whereas agents reproduce and contest it in their own fashion through relationships. Archer points out that her analysis focuses on three cycles: *structural conditioning, interaction and structural elaboration* (ibid). The situation for the researcher becomes clarified when he/she is able to detect how historical elements influence contemporary agency actions and guide social structuring.²⁹

²⁸ "Morphogenesis refers to those processes which tend to elaborate or change a system's given form, state or structure" (Buckley 1967: 58: quoted in Archer 1995: 166). "[...] Morphostasis refers to those processes in complex system-environment exchanges which tend to preserve or maintain a system's given form, organisation or state." (Archer 1995: 166).

²⁹ The M/M [morphogenetic/morphostatic] approach seeks to go further than providing a 'clear criterion of historically significant event': it attempts not merely to identify but also to unpack. Thus there is yet more fine-grained work to be done on the conceptualization of structural conditioning, on the specification of how structural influences are transmitted (as reasons not hydraulics) to particular agents in determinate positions and situations (the whom, the when and the where), and on the strategic combinations which result in morphogenesis rather than morphostasis (which outcome) (Archer 1995: 161, author's emphasis)

Hence, Archer's approach, being inter-relational and within the boundaries of critical realism, are combined with the assumption that childhood is a social construction. This allows me to explore the interrelationship between working children and society, i.e., how children act within society without losing their sense of individuality. It is this sense, noted through the observation of action, the researcher is able to grasp on the one hand children's own notions of childhood and work and, on the other, and how they participate in social interaction.

In the light of these diverse approaches (relational process and critical realism) I regard the working children in this study as a group of individuals, as social actors, whose productivity and negotiation skills allow them not only to find the means for survival, but to recreate and participate actively in their particular society. At the same time, they manifest the elements of interpretations of particular notions of child work. In this sense, agency and social action play essential roles in conceptualising the impact children have on their own society, and at the same time affect its structural development. Agency is understood as the capacity of individuals to act upon their relationships, contesting authority and challenging power (Mayall 2002: 21). I take the position that children can be conceived as capable of negotiating their places within family and society, through what they experience in everyday life and especially work. I will examine throughout this study children's interactions, their activities and own accounts of daily life, and how they envisage their primary position within family and society.

It becomes apparent that in this thesis the analysis of child work needs to be multidimensional. There are several points that need to be addressed. Besides offering descriptive elements that support the notion of constructionism, I investigate what are the experiences of children in working terms. More specifically, my first concern is to see how the findings differ from other reported empirical studies. I am concerned with whether the similarities are strong enough to dismiss any observed differences or deviations from the norm offered by previous research. In answering these concerns, one needs to observe the generational changes that have been taking place in terms of spatial and social mobility. This leads the analysis onto my second concern which is about how the notion of work can vary from one generation to the next i.e., what children have learned and reproduced from previous generations and how

relationships have influenced this knowledge, and vary in gender terms. Another concern is how contemporary factors can give child work its specific characteristics, socio-cultural and economic, from the agent's point of view. These generational and agency elements support the idea of analytical interplay between agency and structure proposed by critical realism i.e., understand difference between negotiation roles/statuses or superimposition of the domestic work organisation. This thesis, therefore, aims to reflect the intricate dynamics and fluidity of these phenomena by integrating the different levels by a comprehensive approach.

1.5 Conclusions

This chapter provided a review of the literature on child work and related discussions in anthropology and other social disciplines. Within social theories, the study of children as significant part of society has developed from a peripheral place, to occupy a central position in the analysis of contemporary societies. The scrutiny of children as subjects of social science has not been a straight forward process, especially when it is related to work.

Although the work of children in poor societies has often been considered as a negative experience, it also has been observed that children find enjoyable some activities and are able to make the best out of them, and thus displacing western ideals on childhood. However, work and its meanings, either socio-cultural or economic, have to be placed in an objective perspective, where the importance of children's own accounts and values towards work are set up against family and society expectations. The balance between agency and structure takes a primary role in understanding how the individual choices or delimitations offered to children obey to stronger forces such as society and culture.

Examination of socialisation patterns of working children must include the view of them as agents and take into account their own accords. This is imperative as such children are not passive members of their society, but active contributors who have learned through their own experience and their families' traditions to survive and cooperate within a poor and sometimes hostile environment. While these conditions are not new to Mexico and the rest of the developing societies, one has to realise that

the dynamics must be examined in a fresh way, taking into account children's own voices. Only then it will be possible to realise the exceptional characteristics of such childhood in Oaxaca and provide suitable understanding frameworks. It is always useful to view such dynamics through the experience of the agents as traditional way of life always alters the living patterns and socialisation conditions even when the phenomenon examined appears to be just a repetition of something that has occurred historically in another place and time.

Chapter 2

Oaxaca City and its people

2. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to offer a general description of Oaxaca City and its population. In spite of sharing many common characteristics with other cities in the sub-continent, Oaxaca retains certain economic, historical and socio-cultural features that make it unique and, which contribute directly to the plight of the working children. The descriptions and discussions in this chapter are drawn from my diary notes during fieldwork and other previously published work.

2.1 Location

Situated in the southwest of Mexico, the State of Oaxaca is bordered to the north by the states of Puebla and Veracruz, to the east by Chiapas, to the west by Guerrero, and to the south by the Pacific Ocean (Figs. 1 & 2). It covers some 95, 364 square kilometres, which covers 4.8% of the national territory, constituting the fifth largest State in Mexico (INEGI, AEPEF, 2003). Much of its terrain is mountainous, more than 70 percent, difficult to access (INEGI, Anuario Estadístico de Oaxaca, 2003). Lying at the juncture of the eastern Sierra Madre del Sur and the Sierra de Oaxaca, the State of Oaxaca is also environmentally diverse in terms of landscape, flora and fauna. The temperature can reach 38°C between May and August, and during coldest season between December and March the temperature drops to a 13°C average. The long summer rains rapidly flood the normally slow moving streams and provide with much needed water for the villages in the otherwise dry areas.

The state of Oaxaca is divided in 570 districts. The City of Oaxaca, the political capital, is located in the heart of the state. It was occupied by the Spanish conquistadors in 1521, and many of the large ethnic groups were subjugated until 1550 (Chance 1989: 16). Previously it had been inhabited mainly by Zapotecs and surrounded by other major groups such as the Mixtec who had settled in many areas of the Valley. During the pre-Hispanic era, the city was known as *Huaxyacac*, a name acquired from the *Nahuatl* meaning “*in the nose of the squash*” (Medina Torres 2000).

During the Colonial period its name was changed to *Antequera de Oaxaca* by a distortion of the Spanish and became the third most important centre in New Spain. Today the state and its capital have the same name.

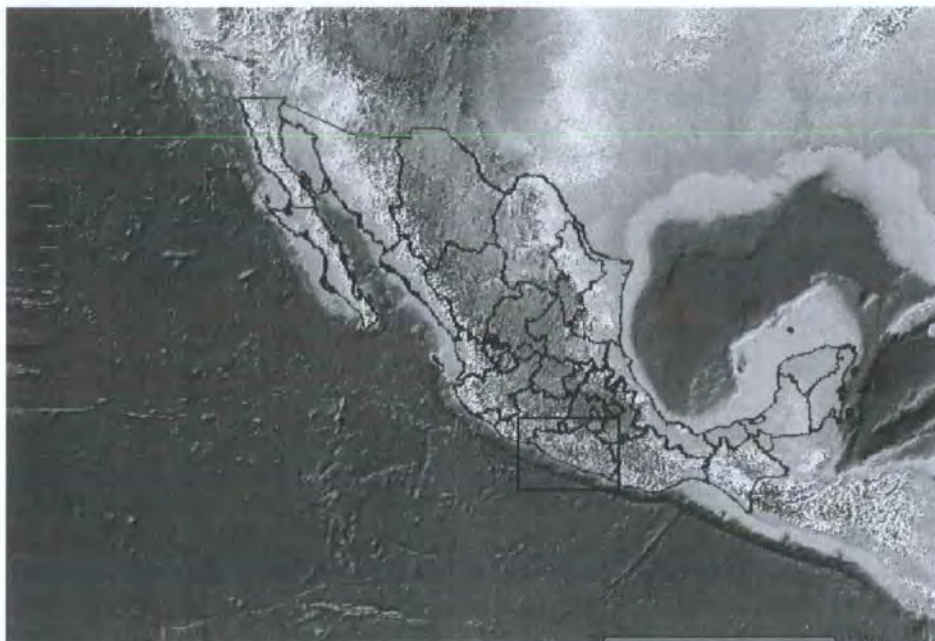


Figure 1. Mexico, Source: INEGI 2004. The shadowed square indicates the area of Oaxaca State.

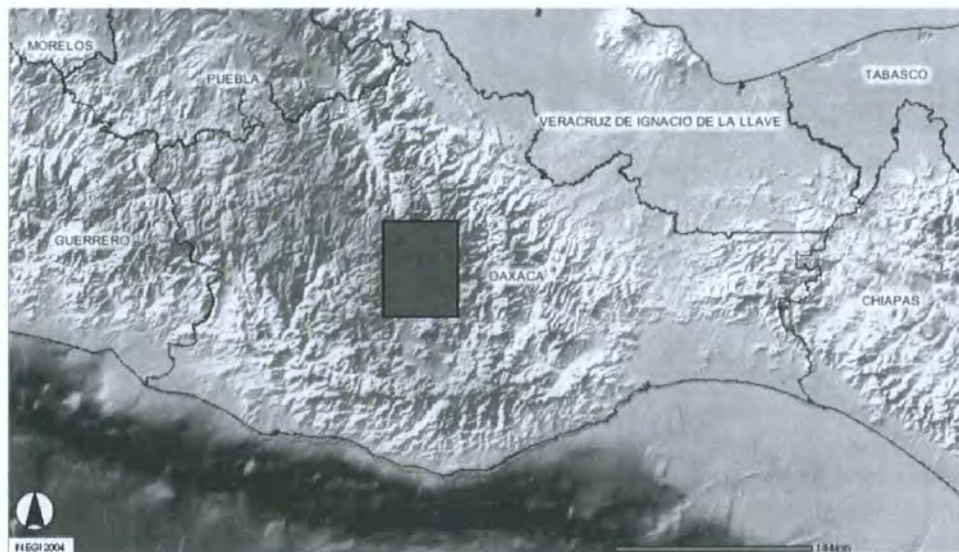


Figure 2. Oaxaca State. Source: INEGI 2004. The red square indicates the area of Oaxaca Valley.

Oaxaca City itself is located in one of the central valleys of the state. These mountains form a “Y”, and Oaxaca City located to the north of the fork. Three mountainous arms (each about 20 to 30 km each) separate the valleys from the Sierras. The *Etla Valley* is located in the northeast; *Tlacolula* delimits to the southwest; whereas the settlements of *Zaachila* and *Zimatlán* are located to the southeast of the valley, and *Ocotlán* in the

south. The rivers *Salado* and *Atoyac* are the main tributaries that cross the city and run from north to their Pacific's deltas (Clarke 2000: 9).

2.2 Oaxaca City

The city of Oaxaca has proved attractive to foreign and domestic visitors. It is far from resembling the traffic chaos, the crowded streets and the pollution to be found in other cities in Mexico. Its main architecture style dates from the colonial period. Historically, Oaxaca had been relatively isolated from the political currents that had affected Middle America since the Aztecs dominated much of it (Romero Frizzi 1996). This isolation was only broken by the construction of a motorway in the mid-twenty century (Murphy & Stepick 1991: 78).

The urban landscape presents significant contrasts, which reflect the political interests and economic differences of the inhabitants. Political and economic differences are clearly seen in the immigrant settlements surrounding the main city i.e., shanty towns or *colonias populares*). As with many cities in Latin America, Oaxaca is characterised by large numbers of rural immigrants settling in the urban-industrial centres (Butterworth & Chance 1981; Cordera et al. 1999). Oaxaca City appears as a heterogeneous city where poverty and wealth are experienced within the same geographical area³⁰. For instance, street child vendors use their own personal charismatic strategies to gain customers, and so compete with some of the high street shops, which also attract the same tourists. Competition is tough for the children because of the quality and nature of the goods sold.

Historically and traditionally, Oaxaca has been one of the most neglected states in economic terms. It is the second poorest state in the country (Cordera et al. 1999: 6). It has the largest number of ethnic groups involving fifteen language groups (Clarke 2000: 13; INEGI, AEPEF 2003). Having inherited one of the most varied pre-Hispanic

³⁰ "Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or are at least widely encouraged or approved in the societies to which they belong." (Davis & Ridge 1997: 7-8). Poor families in Oaxaca do not generally actively participate or are consulted in regional programmes to improve their living conditions.

backgrounds, the Valley of Oaxaca was the political centre of the *Zapotec* and *Mixtec* cultures (Bradomin 1993). Their leaders governed alternately, settling their political capitals very close to the present city centre.



Figure 3 Oaxaca's Zócalo



Figure 4. The main street in the city centre

One of the most important archaeological places in Oaxaca City is Monte Albán. Monte Albán is the 2500 year-old Zapotec capital which was organised as theocratic city. After the arrival of the military government of the *Mixtecs*, Monte Albán became a secondary political centre. At the end of its life in A.D. 700 it was one of the tributary cities of the Aztec “kingdom” until the Spanish conquest (Butterworth & Chance 1981: 6).

At the present time, ancient Monte Albán is located in the northwest of the city. It is a major archaeological site and one of the main tourist attractions. It is also a source of informal economy for the residents of the nearby colonias. It allows the neighbouring population to pursue an irregular income, despite the fact that many of them hardly know anything about the history, and feel culturally detached from it. So, Monte Albán, as is the case for many other archaeological sites, is also relevant in economical terms. It provides local people with an informal economic system.

Another centre of social relationships and economic production are experienced is the *Zócalo* (the city centre). It is the most important zone in which cultural diversity can be observed, e.g., indigenous people from every part of the state, mestizos and foreigners weave apparent and deep relationships. The complexity of relationships between Indians and mestizos can lead to problems which are mainly resolved by the regulation of available space for carrying on their various economic projects.



Figure 5. View of Alameda and the Zócalo

Conventionally, *El Zócalo*, remains as architectural representation of colonial style. It is composed of two parks, the *portales* (arcades), a Catholic cathedral, cafés, and art craft shops. *El Zócalo* is a place for relaxing for the visitors, but also as a work place for most Indian immigrants who perform different activities in order to survive economically. Visitors and middle class Oaxacans spend their evenings and weekends by the side walk cafés, conversing and listening to the local symphonic band.

Everyday, the *Zócalo* exhibits the contradictions of socio-economic and political relationships such as poverty, political struggles, tradition and modernity.

2.3 Economic history

Oaxaca City has experienced many economical changes which, in the main, concern infrastructure and trading directed towards the tourist market (Murphy & Stepick 1991: 82). In part, this was due to the opening in 1943 of a new national road, the *Panamerican* motorway which allowed the city to improve its communication and commerce with the rest of the country (Clarke 2000: 46).

Due to its historical and geographical isolation, the state of Oaxaca has remained largely neglected by the rest of the country's policies and social movements. Consequently, besides the harsh environmental conditions and the ethnic diversity of the people, the economy has been maintained at peasant level, based on pre-Hispanic stratified work organisation (Townsend 1991: 166) combined with the commerce introduced by the Spaniards and development of a low level of industrialisation in the 20th century (Clarke 2000: 148).

Efforts at combining commerce with peasant production are some of the most important aims of the Oaxacan economy. However, many Oaxacans do not regard their cultural heritage as an advantage. Instead, it is perceived by many as a limitation to their progress. Various communities of the peasants live in what Aguirre Beltrán (1973) called "Refugee areas". Refugee areas, refer those regions more or less outside the control of the central political system. A significant number of *Indian* peasants still live in the mountains that surround the capital city, whereas the non-Indian peasants or mestizos and the commercial class are settled in the Oaxaca Valley.

Since colonial times, the economy in Oaxaca has been based, largely, on capitalist trading. In the beginning, the most important goal for the ruling class, the Spaniards was to consolidate a "class structure". The economic and social characteristics of which are still observed in the contemporary economy of the city. In the colony, Spaniards, *criollos* (children born in Mexico of Spaniards), *mestizos* (intermixed races) and other castes were positioned in a system that produced differences in the

access to resources and production³¹. Workers, servants and capitalist traders composed the class structure of the city. This system vanished from the eighteenth century onwards when the caste differences were abolished together with slavery (Butterworth and Chance 1981: 27). Nowadays the class structure is based more on economic differences and on the political power the upper class has had since the Mexican Revolution (ibid.).

Peasants from the Central Valleys represent one of the largest economic population groups. They are engaged in part-commercial production which include personal-consumption, and a limited surplus traded in the regional and national markets (Malinowski & De la Fuente 1982; Murphy and Stepick 1991; Clarke 2000). The largest market is located in the city capital. Fruit, vegetables, textiles, garments, stonework, terracotta pottery, metal artistry work, cheese, meat, mescal (*alcoholic drink*), bread etc., are some of the products sold in the *Central de Abastos* (main distribution market). Traders have enlarged their networks in the urban area, what places them in a more advantageous position than their counterparts in distant and isolated regions, such as the mountain villages.

Subsistence crops are produced for personal consumption in the mountain areas. Traditionally, peasants produced maize, beans, squash, sugar cane and chilli. In the last 400 years they have also introduced commercial crops such as cochineal dye (18th century), flowers, cultivation of agaves or maguey to produce *mezcal* (alcoholic drink made from agaves), fruits of other regions, and, more recently, coffee for domestic and international markets.

After the occupation by the Spanish Crown in Oaxaca, the diverse ethnic groups of the then region of Antequera learned to work not only to obtain the means of survival and for the market, but also to obtain extra money by working for the upper caste, composed by Spaniards and *criollos* (creoles). Some Indians of the previous elite or *caciques* were able to keep their land, property and to participate in low-status political roles in their villages. In contrast to other regions of the country where the *encomienda* flourished (Spanish haciendas given by the Crown to the conquistadors),

³¹ Castes in Mexico were a class-classificatory system to maintain under economic and political control all the new-born persons from racial mixtures, considered by Catholic Spaniards as of inferior status.

in Oaxaca this failed due to the nature of its terrain. So, most villages in the Valley sustained themselves from peasantry and some commercial crops, the mines and the domestic service. The lower class in the social structure, the indigenous people, settled in the valleys and continued working producing goods for personal consumption and to satisfy the needs of the local market. According to Murphy and Stepick (1991), Oaxaca has developed in different periods of engagement and disengagement with the national economy (1991:15). The relative isolation of Oaxaca has been a determining factor marking fewer variations on the local economy than the rest of Mexico. Maintaining a strong peasant economy, it has allowed Oaxacan inhabitants to deal with the volatility of external investment since the arrival of the conquistadors. Referring to periods of involvement in the larger economy one of the most important was during the Colonial times when production of cochineal dye was introduced at an international level.³²

During the colonial period, Oaxaca experienced an era of economic growth where the market was controlled by the elite class, keeping the majority of the population in poverty and thus enlarging the gap between social classes. The labour force was composed mainly of mestizos and Indians working either on extracting dye, or in the textile industry (ibid: 23). It is said that economic growth during the cochineal trade produced more inequality within Oaxaca, creating social and economical differences between the lower and upper class. This led to a period of economic stagnation. As a consequence, Oaxaca suffered once more from isolation from the rest of the nation and the world. The peasants returned to their agricultural work, the urban producers disengaged from the regional market; mining went into bankruptcy and most of the Creole class and Spanish families fled to Spain or Mexico City.

Between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the Twentieth century, Oaxaca had its next period of economic growth, experienced during the government of Porfirio Díaz, a dictator native to the state of Oaxaca. He introduced some economic development through foreign investments. These though created more of

³² Cochineal dye was in high demand from Europe during the 18th century. The biggest production area was located in Oaxaca and it was New Spain that was granted permission to supply it in 1745. Production declined with the beginning of the War of Independence in 1810 (Murphy and Stepick 1991: 22, 27). This dye was obtained from a female worm (*dactylopius coccus*) living on the prickly pear bush. It was used previously by the Aztecs as a natural dye for garments. (Encarta Encyclopaedia 1998)

the elite class than a structured economic development in Oaxaca. During this period, thanks to the construction of the railway that connected Oaxaca with the centre and north of the country, local producers were able to participate in a national commerce network.

One of the important aspects of the labour during this period is the role played by the majority of the population (mestizos, followed by the Indians) in the regional economy. Economic divergence between the lower and upper class grew bigger. Education in the arts and science were promoted for the children of the beneficiaries of these resources, while the poor “had to put their children to work, rather than to send them to school [...]” (Murphy and Stepick 1991: 33). Peasants in peonage work (bind to the lord) for the *hacendados* (land owners), most of them belonging to the Church and independent agricultural units, were isolated from the development the country was pursuing. During the Reform years initiated in 1857, most of these haciendas, expropriated by the State, were unsold and thus unproductive. It was not until the dictatorship of Díaz that some foreign investment was directed to exploit Oaxaca’s natural resources. The privileged “white” class was recognised and taken into account so as to benefit from this sudden economic development. For instance, it became important for the few hacendados to be politically loyal to Díaz because they controlled and maintained the economy in the rural areas:

With a population approaching to 40,000, Oaxaca contained the local Porfirian élite of hacendados, mine-owners, lawyers, administrators, and politicians, who dominated the urban mass, engaged in marketing, manufacturing, and the provision of petty services, including domestic work.
(Clarke 2000: 30)

Development in these economic activities was only possible with the extension of the railway, connecting central Mexico with central and south-east Oaxaca:

In to the 20th century, the expansion of the railway to Tehuantepec and the opening of the Salina Cruz Port (South-east coast of Oaxaca State), brought high hopes for the Oaxacan economic expansion. Though these hopes ceased

*with the Revolution outbreak, rendering Oaxacans as mere witnesses rather than active participators.*³³

With the expansion of the railway, Oaxaca was breaking its isolation, only interrupted by the Revolution war in 1910. In 1920 García Vigil, a liberal politician was elected governor of Oaxaca. He continued the redistribution of land as this was one of the goals of the Revolution. He introduced, also, tax payments causing him to conflict with the Revolutionary *caudillos*³⁴ that expelled him from his position (Clarke 2000: 31). These attempt to engage the Oaxaca economy into the broader system and lasted almost fifty years (ibid.).

Nowadays, with the extension of the motorway connecting Mexico City and Oaxaca City, it has become possible once again to re-establish communication between the centre and south of the country. In spite of this, Oaxaca has never fostered an industry of high technology and production. The most significant elements of the national economy are the sudden and unstructured urbanisation and important migrant movements in the last two decades. Oaxaca has brought some of the elements of an urbanised society to its people, mostly to the population settled in Oaxaca City. The Oaxacan economy today is based on commerce and the service industry, while a considerable income comes from abroad, from the Mexicans working in the USA, who send money home.

During the years after the Revolution, the economy grew slowly, lagging in comparison to the rest of the country. This is also reflected in other social elements like the implementation of health, education, and infrastructure services. Consequently, a large number of workers from the countryside are involved in the national and international labour market. On the other hand the number of regional traders and politicians increased significantly and gained importance in the dynamics of the economy.

³³ There was a group of peasants from the Sierra Juárez and the Mixtec region who kept fighting until 1919 in a guerrilla war (Garner 1985: 1988).

³⁴ *Caudillos* were those war veterans who became the political ruling class. The main characteristic of this class was their engagement in high positions during the Revolution time side.

Progress is still a valuable goal for most of the people, acknowledging it as a symbol of the middle and upper classes. Improving house building, buying electrical supplies, clothes, education, and increasing personal income are some of the examples that reflect the meaning of progress. For the diverse ethnic groups, progress means also an important change in their environment by moving from the rural areas to the urban centres. Oaxaca City, Mexico City and even the United States are large centres of immigration. The wealthier Indian and peasant families send their men's labour force to the USA³⁵. Most of the towns in the seven Oaxaca regions have been left deserted by men, so only children, women and elderly people remain. These families have improved their living standards though due to the revenues received from abroad. Therefore, progress has been experienced mostly in the micro-economy, leaving the industry and large commercial activities to other Mexican regional states.

2.4 Indians and mestizos

In Oaxaca City, more than 60 per cent of population is composed by Oaxacan migrants from all over the state, whose principal goal has been to improve their living standards (Murphy, et al. 1999: 7). These people belong to the 570 different municipalities that now form the Oaxaca State. They look for opportunities to integrate themselves onto the mainstream of urbanity by accessing wage labour, formal education and access to health services. The greatest immigration period was in the 1950s, when for Oaxaca it reached 60 per cent of the urban population, growing at a 5 per cent per annum (Murphy and Stepick 1991: 48). In the 1980s at least one third of the population were native to the city (ibid.). In the early 1990s, most of the immigrants in Oaxaca City (68 per cent) were of peasant origin. This is reflected in the finding that male household heads are mostly immigrants, who occupied a larger proportion than men born in the city (70 percent of men are immigrants). For female heads, the proportion is also larger than city-born head women (74 percent of female headed households) (Rees, Morris and Winter 1991). Although immigration movements are not a new phenomenon in Oaxaca, dating back to the occupation of the Spaniards, it reached its peak in the 1980s, when the vast majority of the peasant

³⁵ The surveys show that out-migration from Oaxaca to other Mexican cities and the USA was over 1 million of people between 1970 and 1990 (Clarke 2000: 136).

population suffered from the effects of the economic crisis³⁶. These migration movements have influenced the view that society has moved towards Indians in a socio-cultural sense by including them in a larger socio-political and economical project. The ideal of a single national identity, the one embodied by the mestizos, has been pursued since the end of the Revolution in the 1920s. However, integration movements have never succeeded in bringing the same life standards and opportunities for Indians, there is a social racism exacerbated by intellectuals of the first half of the 20th century (Doremus 2001).

The debate about Indians (native populations) and *mestizos* (mixture of native and European cultures) differences revolved around cultural issues rather than racial concerns. After the end of the Revolution in 1923, Mexico was in search of an identity to homogenise its population. First were the writers and other intellectuals who suggested eradicating the “negative” elements of the Indian cultures (ibid. 378). It was intended to substitute them with more progressive elements in order to accomplish a “National Plan”, by creating the cultural and social basis for *mestizaje* or mixture of races and cultures named the “cosmic race” by Vasconcelos (1994). It included the adaptation of Spanish as lingua franca, as the official language, putting aside the many indigenous languages spoken for centuries by the diverse ethnical groups around Mexico. Therefore, language became one of the most important elements to differentiate Indians from mestizos or *gente de razón* (people of reason).

The *Indianist* movement, fostered by the Mexican State, resulted in an intensive project to “re-educate” Indians to become more “westernised” while denying most of their traditional cultural characteristics, perceived as an obstacle to national integration and progress. The ethnic communities under this project were not recognised anymore as Indians, but as Mexicans with access to the same opportunities such as education, health services employment and so on. In the 1940s this movement became formalised, embodied in the *Instituto Nacional Indigenista* (National Indigenous Institute) in order to standardise aspects of a Mexican culture and at the same time to protect the positive aspects of the diversity of Indian cultures. In

³⁶ During and after the Post Second World war, Mexican labourers were hired in the United States farmers and manufactures for periods of few years. Their contracts were result as the need of the North American of cheap labour as a result of shortage of their own labour market. Its legal character contrasts to the other period of mass-migration of the 1980s (Verduzco-Igartua 1995).

practical terms, one of the strategies of the project of acculturation followed was the introduction of formal education to indigenous communities. On the one hand, the most important policy was the implementation of rural schooling. Its aim was to provide not only the material facilities for formal education, but also to transmit the political and social values of the Revolution, alien to most of the indigenous people. On the other hand, what was considered that the positive characteristics of the ethnic groups should be stimulated: “Indian customs, music, dance and rituals were rehabilitated and woven into a new tapestry of folkloric nationalism; revolutionary martyrs, like Zapata, were proclaimed an *indigenista* cause” (Knight 1990: 82).

Rural education was deemed bilingual but despite the intention to protect bilingualism, some Indian people regarded native languages as a sign of stagnation, an obstacle to progress like the mestizos people in the urban centres. Therefore the progress of *mestizaje*³⁷ or acculturation was not stopped when the Revolution brought out all its new ideas about progress and unification. Indians from all over Mexico and Oaxaca started massive migration to the cities. Their children learnt Spanish rather than their parents’ native languages. One of the legacies of these movements is the prejudice against the Indian languages. Even today, it is common to hear mestizos and even indigenous people to talk scornfully about the Indian languages, referring to them pejoratively as “dialects” and therefore in a lower status from Spanish. Adults of Indian origin prefer to communicate in their native languages only while visiting their villages. Mestizos on the other hand, were originally a racial category, a caste of the Spanish classification to distinguish the many racial mixtures originated in the New Spain (Butterworth & Chance 1981: 25). Mestizos were the result of a Spanish and Indian union. From being a minority in the colonial times, they became a very important element in the transformation from New Spain to Mexico as a sovereign nation. Before the Revolution in the 1910s, most mestizos belonged to the emerging middle class which consolidated just afterwards. With the *Indigenista* project initiated in the 1940s, the perception and image of *mestizo* identity was acknowledged in cultural terms. This transformation put aside racial elements that were lessening the idea of national unity (Caso 1948; Gamio 1942). In real terms, the project of single cultural population failed in providing the mechanisms to integrate *Indians* from so

³⁷ Race mixture usually between Spaniards and Indians, or Criollos with Indians. It was the category imposed by the Spanish during colonial times to differentiate racial subordinate groups or *castas*. In the Twentieth century *mestizaje* became a cultural term rather than racial.

many different ethnical backgrounds. Hence, a socio-cultural and a race separation exist despite the efforts of intellectuals and some politicians to constitute a “*mestizo* nation” (Riding 1985).

The persistence of racial differences is noted in a number of ways. In Oaxaca this is still observable between *Indians* who are associated with underdevelopment, and mestizos identified with progress (Gamio 1942; Doremus 2001). In geographical terms, this separation is observable in the way populations are settled: the south of Mexico is mainly populated by indigenous people, while the north and centre are mostly inhabited by mestizos and white people. Until recently, *mestizo* population settled in Oaxaca tended to live within the confinements of privileged urban areas while Indians preferred rural areas (Murphy and Stepick 1991). Today that separation is more subtle in economic terms. It has been observed that most Indians are peasants, but not all peasants are Indians. In Oaxaca, mestizos and indigenous people are spread around the Central Valleys, and engaged in a mixed economy, combining personal-consumption and production and commercialisation for the regional market, enlarging their trade networks to include the capital city (Clarke 2000). Nowadays this mixed population works within the informal economy. Entire households participate in producing and selling their products in the central market, which saves them money and labour. Periodically, they bring part of the surplus to be sold in the central market. Most of them have established permanent commercial stalls; whereas a few visit the market only irregularly to sell cheap products or resort to exchange.

Another difference between *Indians* and mestizos in economic terms is the quality of their jobs. Mestizos usually are positioned in steady jobs in the government offices, as white-collar employees; managing family business and belonging to the educated aspiring class. Culturally, language, traditional dress and work are relevant differences between mestizos and indigenous people. Although in Oaxaca City mestizos are the most widespread population, they differentiate themselves by speaking Spanish and wearing “urban-modern” clothing. Despite having similar racial features both groups shared many cultural traits (Doremus 2000). Many of these “new” mestizos have fostered middle class urban traits while preserving the “nice” indigenous customs (Gamio 1942). Despite the language diversity in Oaxaca City, Spanish is the main language for public use but indigenous people prefer to speak their own language

amongst themselves. Children are more able to speak Spanish now not only at school, but even within the family, and proves a very useful skill while working on the streets (see also Salazar 1998: 159). Moreover, many school children have learned to speak a few words of foreign languages such as English, French and German.

While various cultural differences can be identified between these two ethnic groups, the common element is that they share and strive to preserve the syncretism of the pre-Hispanic and colonial customs. These include the mixture of Catholic and Indian traditions. There are many important feasts which allow people to express cultural syncretism: examples being All Saints and All Souls Day, the feast of *La Virgen de la Soledad*, the patron saint in the city of Oaxaca and the Night of the Radishes³⁸. Cultural features, the sense of community and the inherited Catholic customs and beliefs attribute an important character to these celebrations. Poor and wealthy families are proud of being Oaxacans. Therefore, they are constantly made aware of their traditions, which provide a sense of community that is expressed not only in celebrating, but also in working.

³⁸ The Night of the Radish is part of the Christmas celebrations in Oaxaca City. Every 23rd of December, an exhibition of carved radishes takes place in the Zócalo of the city. According to Municipality of Oaxaca City, the Night of the Radishes was a horticulture festival initiated in 1897. It was intended to introduce the radishes brought from Europe, to the diet of the locals.

2.5 Work opportunities in Oaxaca City

The influence of rural life on Oaxaca's people is present in the daily social relationships that allow reproduction of the households and society. Oaxaca, as mentioned earlier, has achieved relatively little in terms of economic and industrial development. Therefore, people base their subsistence on a restricted labour market. Traditional forms of work are usually not considered as productive in economic assessments by the National Statistical Institute (INEGI). This is evident when people of peasant origin and low literacy³⁹, and limited labour skills attempt to survive in the Oaxaca environment. As well as the jobs that provide an income for the household, there is also a type of non-paid work that maintains a firm bond with tradition and the community's well being (Murphy et al. 1999: 7).

Oaxaca is known for this strong tradition of cooperative work that prevails within their people and also amongst other Mexican states. Social networks, the culture and the dynamics of the peasant economy have provided labour resources that contribute towards the continuation of lifestyle. *Guelaguetza* or *Gozona* is a peasant type of work, based on mutual aid provided by households or families. This work offers the kind of help households could not afford by themselves. A household involved in *guelaguetza* always pays back the help given previously by either performing the same type of work or a different activity, examples being domestic work such as cooking; building houses, preparation for parties, planting, and harvesting tasks (Nader 1964: 247).

Mutual aid of this type is something more than economic co-operation, it is an expression of equality, of mutual respect and courtesy. Everyone who is invited to do gozona, participates in the work. It is not considered appropriate to hire a man to do gozona, for gozona is an expression of the social ties that bind men in unwritten contract to aid one another (ibid.: 248).

The other type of communal work is called *Tequio* and is required by the community and organised periodically by the municipality. It comprises activities such as paving

³⁹ Clarke 2000: 149. According to Clarke, Oaxaca State has the lowest rate of literacy in the country.

roads, community building construction i.e., schools and hospitals; clearing the boundaries of the municipality, and so on (Clarke 2000: 193). Originally this was a rural tradition and when introduced to urban situations it still has rural characteristics. *Tequio* reflects and maintains social networks. It replaces labour and wages in the name of the community's well being. It is also a way to make use of available labour when technology is unavailable. *Tequio* enables the community to substitute for the State's failure to provide infrastructure, economic resources and wages to pay for necessary facilities and services for its people.

All the household members participate in the *guelaguetza*, while in the *tequio* only men over 18 years are required to work, at least every Sunday.⁴⁰ "Male absentees from communal work are liable to moral and financial sanctions" (ibid.). Therefore, most of community members are socially obliged to offer these services.

In urban areas, *gozona* and *tequio* are still performed. Nonetheless *tequio* is an obligatory non-paid activity, whereas *gozona* has changed its manifestation, entering mostly into the festive and sacred occasions. Individuality in urban contexts has provided a different environment for *gozona*. It has become more feminine and centred into organising sacred occasions like baptisms, weddings, funerals, and school graduations.

Urban residents have struggled to maintain the social and economical elements of their places of origin. These, however, have been modified by the urban context, such as through multiethnic encounters, the political interests of some people, and the need for a regular wage replacing the agricultural work in the countryside. Therefore, the complexity of the urban economy and labour has resulted in people resorting to whatever is available for their basic needs. *Gozona*, *tequio*, women and children's work demonstrate how work has expanded beyond the available paid-labour resources, to enable immigrants to adjust to the regional economic environment (Clarke 2000: 150).

⁴⁰ I found that male children also contribute in the *tequio* along with their male relatives. They help them to carry out their tasks faster. It is important to note as well that these boys were usually very eager to work in the *tequios*, while for most of the male adults it may be rather a burden task.

2.6 Informal sector

It is held generally that the informal and formal sectors are two separate entities (Castelles & Portes 1993). However, this image is not always accurate. In this study, the informal sector is understood as the category of employment that is not regulated by labour law, and so is unstructured and uncertain. Usually its work force relies on low paid labour such by family members, in labour flexibility where women and children work long hours, often performing unskilled work in non-protected working conditions (Salazar 1998). The formal sector on the other side is characterised by being legal, regulated, with more or less steady wages, social security and is performed by a skilled labour force, recognised by society. However, both are constantly crossing their boundaries because the production may be moving from one to the other side during the manufacturing process (Cartaya 1987; Castells & Portes 1993).

Oaxaca City's main labour market is found in the informal sector due to its low industrial development; though in the last three decades the considerable growth of tourist industry and its investment has provided some economic opportunities, occupying the fourth most invested state in tourism (INEGI, AEPEF 2003). This informal market coincides with the rise in immigrant population numbers, from a 60 per cent to 66 per cent between 1970s and late 1980s respectively (Murphy et al. 1999: 8; Clarke 2000: 151). Today, around 30 percent of the local population is self-employed, while 68 percent work in the service sector⁴¹ (INEGI 2000). Agriculture is another area where people find employment. Oaxaca City possesses the largest market in the state. Originally located in the heart of the city, it moved to the outskirts the city, to a bigger building area called "Central de Abastos". It combines a peasant market (see Malinowski & De La Fuente 1982) with a modern range of stalls that satisfies a more urban demand. Itinerant markets and fairs are another source of employment for the families in the city. These markets usually consist on a series of mobile stalls of a range of different agricultural and tourist products. The first type is called *tianguis* (Aztec term meaning "open market"). Tianguis market resembles

⁴¹ The self-employment in the colonia comprises all those activities which are created under non-legal conditions and allow people to organise their own activities and timetables. Whereas the service sector comprises both, formal and informal activities. In the first case, most jobs within the formal frame include sales, and white collar jobs. In the informal activities are include washing clothes, cleaning, baby-sitting, cooking, which generally are underpaid and with no minimum labour conditions enforced.

Italian street markets. The second type of mobile market is called *ferias* or fairs and is dedicated to offer art crafts, snacks and games for tourists on every festival occasion.

According to government charts, 54.05 percent of the total population over 12 years old is employed (INEGI 1998). As the large scale surveys carried out by INEGI, do not allow for workers in the informal sector or children under the age of 16 years working without parent consent, the only data available is one item which refer to the population working independently, which does not reveal whether they are registered or not as wage labourers. The survey shows a 43.54 percent of the population belong to this category and another 20.89 percent of people work for relatives without receiving wages (ibid.).

Tourism is an important source of income for the state. In the last few years, the governors have invested heavily in improving the image of the city, creating service jobs and markets for some products. The informal sector has made the best of this economic phenomenon. Poor families take advantage of tourist season opportunities by selling services and products, e.g., as cooks in restaurants or street stalls, maids in small hotels, selling cheap art crafts on the streets, performing music and singing, and so on.

2.7 Formal sector

As we have seen before, the formal sector is limited to white collar jobs, work in factories and commerce. It is estimated that today 45 per cent of the formal labour, comprising upper and middle class people, is employed in elite, bureaucracy and white-collar jobs (Clarke 2000: 150). The dynamics of this sector are a reflection of the entire Mexican social system. The people's access to formal jobs is necessarily linked to social networks and key connections as people call them (*influencias*). Therefore, to get a job of quality does not necessarily require relevant experience or specific knowledge for certain positions. Candidates rather need to be in good terms with people in the recruitment offices. Therefore, establishing personal connections may be a more valuable skill than specific training to obtain a good post or even promotion in one's workplace. Poor families have rarely the ability to find a job in institutions or formal jobs as poverty rarely provides the right connections for those

positions. The social networks of poor people are limited to their liaisons with relatives and neighbours usually sharing the same social background. Thus, one of the continuous complaints of poor families is the limited range of jobs in the formal sector available to them: in the 1990s, the average percentage of people “working on their own account” was of 47 percent of the total labour market, and decreased to 41 per cent in the early 2000s (INEGI, AEPEF 2003: 7). This implies not only the need for regular wages, but social security and other contributions towards their income. Although many of these households working in the informal sector possess land in their places of origin, little money can be obtained to cover the basic needs of reproduction. Some of them have sold their properties back home and are left only with their small home in the shanty-towns and the *colonias*. *Colonia* families are mainly engaged in informal activities.⁴²

For the last 20 years, working conditions in the formal sector have been undermined and a tendency to incorporate complex technologies has undermined the previous labour structures that offer some security to the employers. In many cases even some of the advantages of these jobs have been erased from the working contracts. The privatisation of some of the State enterprises by foreign capitalists has left people under the control of new working conditions, frequently unprotected or ignored by the organisation’s foreign owners. Also, the volatility of the markets and the foreign investment has created uncertain working conditions. Today, workers are regarded in many cases as temporary, known as associates; whereas such jobs used to be permanent. Social security has been reduced, while minimum salaries have been stagnant, whereby keeping the majority of families living at subsistence level⁴³ (Estrada 1996; Estrada et al. 2004).

Although it was hoped that government-owned companies being privatised would bring about economic growth; but, in fact, it just worsened the economic situation country-wide for both middle and low class families. This neo-liberalisation of the

⁴² Over 42.6 percent of the population is under 15 years old which makes it a strong factor for poor households to rely on children’s work (revise note), INEGI 1998.

⁴³ Most of the labour force earns less than one minimum wage (36.78 percent) (ibid.), information which corresponds to the data verified during my fieldwork. However, the statistics do not include the incomes from household members employed in non regular activities such as children and women living with an active working partner.

market has put the majority of these families within the boundaries of poverty and established the informal sector as an income resource (Estrada et al. 2004: 35).

Both in Oaxaca and throughout Mexico, steady jobs are a symbol of security and “progress” for the middle and lower classes. Labour in the formal sector also generates other images and meanings. People here feel respectable and secure. They usually hope to acquire properties (i.e., house, land, apartments, cars) and in the long term to get a pension. But Oaxacans have few opportunities to obtain stable jobs. In Oaxaca City, apart from the white-collar jobs in the municipality’s government, there are only two factories, those process soft drinks, a telecommunications company, two public and one private university and some service jobs catering for tourists.

2.8 Oaxaca’s ethnic identity

As I mentioned above, the ethnical diversity related to the state of Oaxaca is also found in the city. However, it is important to highlight the social and cultural characteristics of Oaxacans.

During the 20th century, Oaxaca was among the poorest States in Mexico (Clarke 2000). The economy of the countryside, and in most urban areas of Oaxaca, is based on agriculture. Only recently tourism industry has become the major source of gross state income (INEGI 2000). The people of Oaxaca strive to overcome their poverty and state neglect by working in any kind of jobs available. The list of obstacles they have to overcome includes the geographical position, certain historical features, and the current economic environment consisting of a lack of business opportunities. To compensate for these, Oaxacans aim to display economic and political strategies to cope with poverty, which are rooted in their ethnic heritage (Chance 1989). Most of the immigrants of second or third generation are now involved in a more urban and intellectual environment. Indigenous young people have played a fundamental part in this change of self-conception. Law and political sciences are the main interest of young students, which are part of a new middle class. Benito Juárez, a national figure, epitomises a person whose personal achievement has been reached through hard work and self-sacrifice, allowing him to gain political and historical recognition. Therefore, many university students decide to study law and politics in order to find a job within

State government. More recently, women seek to acquire a university education as well. Unlike the majority of men studying at the university, women represent a minority of the new intellectuals. Young women have more obstacles to overcome, not only in terms of economical support, but also in terms of gender roles and recognition (Beneria & Roldan 1987).

Oaxaca is characterised not only by its ethnic diversity, but also by its creativity. Many artists, politicians, inventors, etc. have been born in Oaxaca. The indigenous artisans are recognised by the detail and colourfulness of the handcrafts. Workshops of art crafts are other important sources of income for the peasant immigrants (Clarke 2000: 150). Art crafts used to be activities that were part of household reproduction. Today they increase the income of families living in urban areas. Handcrafts are sold everywhere, either by adults or children. They sell their art pieces cheaply, trading, bartering and negotiating with the visitors and tourists. The handcrafts are no longer part of the peasant cultural assets, but merchandise for tourists.

Food and drink are the other two elements of which Oaxacans are proud. As it has been mentioned above, Oaxaca citizens have transformed their indigenous products of sustenance, to sources of survival and pride. Many of the main diet products belong to the “Mexican” or Middle America diet: maize, beans, chilli, squash, *nopales* (prickly pear)⁴⁴ and coffee. However, due to the dry environmental conditions, other products were utilized: the consumption of insects and exotic plants became as common as the other products. In the absence of livestock during the pre-Hispanic era, other sources of protein have been incorporated into the native diet: crickets, ants, worms, iguana, armadillo and other small animals. New recipes were created after the Conquest, acquiring many of the ingredients of the Spanish cookery and becoming a *criolla cuisine*. However, the diet preserves the taste of the indigenous dishes. Cooking is mainly a women’s task. However, men are involved as well in the preparation of food and drink. Peasant men abilities to cook are concentrated mainly in preparing sweets and alcoholic drinks such as mezcal.

⁴⁴ This cactus or cactaceae *Opuntia robusta* is part of the comestible plants spread in North America.

Mezcal production was a domestic industry until it became popular amongst mestizos and foreigners. It used to be drunk at feasts, but now is part of the common diet and is not a sacred drink any more. It is customary to identify Oaxaca mezcal by the worms in the bottle of one kind. Today all these peasant diet traditions are part of the tourist attractions much like the handcrafts. Oaxacans take advantage of their cultural traditions and sell traditional dishes to support their economy.

A few decades ago, gender roles reflected the traditional stereotypes of “macho” males and “passive” females (see Thrall 1978). While the “machismo” attitude is often related to authoritarian, aggressive and unfaithful sexual relationships, reality can overcome these images.⁴⁵ Women in Mexico, in contrast, strive to fit the ideal, docile, domestic and faithful image, displayed by looking after their children satisfactory and having a well maintained home. However, in Oaxaca this stereotype is often under threat (see chapter 6). Actually, women play an important role in everyday decision-making. In the past, although women of all status were educated to obey men, some were concerned also about the outside world, beyond the domestic boundaries. The middle and upper classes are more conservative, whereas poor women tend to suffer unstable relationships due to poverty. Sometimes they have more than one partner in their lives.⁴⁶ Despite the aggressiveness of *machos* in Mexico, and the poor work opportunities for women, the dominant pattern of the nuclear ideal family spreads continuously; whilst many families still remain faithful to the principles of the Catholic Church and supported by a conservative upper class. A single mother, a divorcee or separated women carry certain social stigmas. Here society has an important part ruling gender roles and qualifying relationships according to social standards (Chant 1991). Therefore, many women chose to “suffer” an oppressive and rather miserable life than to be alone (as I realize when interviewing some of the mothers of this study).

⁴⁵ “As we shall see that ‘sexual intercourse’ is a symbol that serves to define the ‘inside’; it relates a man to his wife (they can copulate), and it relates a man to his inner group of kinsmen (by virtue of incest taboo). We shall see that so long as it stays where it belongs, extramarital sexual behaviour is not actively punished. But when it goes beyond the inner circle, that is, when one forces his inner circle to expand its circle of ‘people who live close to them’ and to alter its distinction between the inside and the outside, the apparatus of sanction is brought into play” (Selby 1974:70).

⁴⁶ Chant argues that husbands do not necessarily imply that they do not obtain satisfactory relationships from other men in their kin group (Chant 1991: 22); which empirically is not only proved to be true, but it was observed that women also are capable of having “unfaithful” relationships, or finding new partners after being abandoned by their husbands.

In economic terms, women of the lower class work as actively as men do. Decreasing wages together with the rise of consumer expectations have made it unaffordable for most men to play the traditional role as exclusive breadwinners. Women and children play an important role in providing the minimal requirements for survival. However, according to social and moral values, men should maintain the role of main provider and breadwinner, and a responsible figure in the family.

Generally, women play the central role in providing emotional support, while men have a peripheral and secondary function. An emotional man is viewed as weak and lacking in authority, usually associated with the fears of homosexuality (see Lewis 1959). In Oaxaca, however, there is a spectrum of tolerance towards both sides of the phenomena. While husbands of poor women resort to have more than one partner, at the same time, homosexuality is allowed in the wealthy traditional families that provide economical and emotional support to homosexual children. These homosexuals or “*muxes*” as they are called in Zapotec are respected because they keep a single status, providing emotional back up to the ageing parents. Therefore, is not unusual to find young men dressed as women, behaving in a feminine way and acting proudly of their gender role. Oaxaca is one of the Mexican states where homosexuals have gained a sort of social recognition while in other parts it is marked as deviant behaviour.

Oaxaca exhibits a lower birth rate compared with other states in Mexico. Since 1940 migration movements from the countryside to the urban areas, have defined even more the low rates of population growth. According to INEGI, an increment of 4 per cent per year between 1940 and 1985 was registered. People have moved mainly to the periphery of Oaxaca City, towards the hillsides near Monte Albán (Murphy & Stepick 1991: 46). In spite of the fact that many migrant families have chosen to settle in Oaxaca City, other residents are obliged to travel daily from the valley villages to schools, markets, bureaucratic offices and leisure places, making the place very active during the whole year.

The average number of family members is 5.6 (Murphy 1991: 49). 48 per cent of the population are men, whereas the 51.1 per cent are women; 42.6 per cent of the entire

population are less than 15 years old, and the average age is 18 years old (21st Censo General de Población y Vivienda 1990, INEGI 1990).

Contraceptive methods are becoming widespread among the poor families. However, many women are finding themselves in the predicament of choosing between a man's decision making, which the Catholic Church believes in, and their own health concerns. Women fear the injurious effects of surgery. However, many of them are trying contraceptive methods, while dealing with their husbands' opposition, at the same time, so as to avoid gossip.

2.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented some general aspects of the City of Oaxaca and its inhabitants. As with the other chapters, the aim is to present some of the ordinary lives of Oaxacan working children and their socio-cultural context. Depicting some of the historical and socio-cultural aspects of the city, has allowed me to have a better understanding of the dynamics of the way relationships take place and structure daily life of the children in the colonia. In this chapter I aimed to present the background of a larger scale, in which the colonia and the children are embedded. In anticipating that society and structure influence each other in temporal-spatial interplay thus the importance of taking into account the society's structure, is in order to understand how children are influenced by it or are able to influence it through their own agency attitudes (Archer 1998).

Chapter 3

Methodology

3. Introduction

In this chapter I describe the methodology used to obtain an in-depth qualitative examination of children's own accounts, their lifestyle, which enabled me to reach into children's emotional lives and see them as a distinct community within an adult society. My further aim was to try to discover, by direct observation, whether children conceive their work in the same way as adults, or if they are actively constructing their own notions of childhood.

The material collected throughout my fieldwork in Oaxaca City between June 1999 and May 2000, was comprised of direct interviews with individuals and groups, personal notes, expanded written accounts and some photographic material. The methodology employed was structured around the classic anthropological research approach. This was combined with empirical techniques developed to fit the demands of the nature of my informants and the peculiarity of the children's activities. In the initial stages of my fieldwork, I modified and refined the research tools to make them appropriate to the local setting. Developing personalised interview strategies and research techniques was also found to be necessary due to the size of my sample, the place and social environment difficulties, time constraints and financial limitations. In the following sections I will be detailing the above methodological approach and exploring what other methods I found necessary to devise in some situations (table 1).

3.1 Approach to the analytical unit

From the beginning, when planning this research, many methodological questions were raised. Some of them had been already addressed by anthropologists, and other social science scholars, e.g., Qvortrup (1991); Nieuwenhuys (1994); Jenks (1997); James et al. (1998). How to approach children is always challenging. Today social scientists are learning to accept children as a social category worthy of being understood using a variety of approaches (Greg & Taylor 1999; Benthall 1992).

Table 1
Fieldwork methods, advantages and drawbacks

Technique utilized		Advantages offered	Drawbacks encountered	Technique utilized	Advantages offered	Drawbacks encountered	
Delimiting the analytical unit		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spread child work experience but limited research from social sciences. Children as a source of knowledge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tendency of adults to disregard children as competent in referring to their own lives.. 	Observing children's places	Household	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intergeneration interviews. Interviews to children, parents and other relatives to understand relationships and work notions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Differential use of authority. Adults influencing children's testimonies.
Working children as research subjects		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They are worth it to be studied in their own right, as active social and economic agents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invisibility of children as workers. 		School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observing children during class and in their school breaks. Understanding another integral aspect of children's lives. Non-academic activities, extracurricular, spare time and truancy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to school premises was not always easy. Difficulty to tackle the subject of truancy with children and adults.
Selecting the fieldwork location		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A location with a high proportion of working children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not able to live within the location.. 		Streets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permission to observe children selling products and services from children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interference with their activities, and with earning money.
Selecting the informants		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children with working experiences and willing to participate. Ages 8 to 16 year olds, both genders, and significant adults 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To face ideas and some preconceptions about what is considered working children Leaving aside other age groups, particularly younger children. 		Public spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Market as an important centre of productive child activity. Observations of their negotiations with other agents, adults and children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Same as above.
Sampling		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-random or purposive sampling: NGO <i>Child to Child</i> contact. Snowball sampling to enlarge the informant groups and trace social networks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Having a reduced sample. 	Sunday meetings		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor children's activities during the week and compare them to the rest of the children. Topics were given by the children and me according to their own week events, casual or purposive. Use of thematic subjects. Instructive and indicative activities carried out: drawing, reading stories and providing oral descriptions of their week's experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Having a mixed age group of children was sometimes difficult to manage. This became tricky when trying to obtain answers and organizing activities with older children..
Observation and participant observation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confirming information from prior interviews. Observing daily productive activities. Speaking the same language and sharing some cultural aspects made rapport easier. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taking for granted some activities or experiences. 				
Interviewing	Informal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carrying out interviews almost at any moment & place. Relevant information was gathered, which otherwise could have passed ignored. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not being able to record in more detail some testimonies. 	Photographs		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It was intended to capture children in daily activities and obtain children's own pictures of themselves and peers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It was discontinued due to the difficulty to obtain their consent to photograph people ordinary activities besides taking portraits.
	Un-structured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possibility to gather information in almost any environment or circumstances. It suits children because they feel is not a chore more, but more like a game. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviews were not always completed in a single moment. 				
	Semi-structured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviewing key informants in single interviews: teachers, employers and market seller and relatives. Treating specific issues, i.e., considerations about working children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulty to confirm some information. Trouble obtaining appointments for interviews. 				
Recording interviews		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tape recording interviews when taking notes was a problem. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults, more than children, felt a bit awkward. Later, they learned to ignore it. 	Informed consent & confidentiality		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All subjects were consulted of the implications and consequences of their participation throughout fieldwork. Pseudonyms have replaced real names to guarantee anonymity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only one household declined to continue to participate due to medical reasons.
Data		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gathered through face to face interviews. Written notes. Observant participation. Tapc recorded. Transcribed to a fieldwork diary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questionnaires and diaries for children were discarded due to the lack of interest from children and adults. 	Reciprocity		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It was of subjective character. Acted as confidant to children and female adults. Children bestowed upon me this privilege. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The inability to reciprocate in material terms, which at the same time could have caused ethical complications.
Analysis of data		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transcribed and coded interviews by topics and informants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizing scattered data from informal interviews. Coding is exhaustive. Finding key topics. 	Ethics		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worthiness of understanding children work experiences is of the same importance as understanding any other social phenomenon. Children's right to be primary informants in research focusing on them. Active role of children, proposing some themes in the Sunday meetings. (see Alderson 2004: 100). Presenting children's quotations and their contexts offers a greater picture of children's participation (Alderson 2004, 101; Bernard 1995: 364). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discontinuity of some of the methods due to ethical considerations towards children's own feelings. The use of diaries by children and questionnaires was perceived as a prolongation of school duties, seen as not very positive, ambivalent. Their responses lacked involvement and children felt pressurised.

However, for the anthropologists the problem to be solved is how to understand by using traditional methods, children's responses, as they are not always able to express themselves in the way that adults do (Toren 1985).

One of the essential questions, I faced, was how to approach the children as individuals, with their own personalities and views of the world. Children are different from adults, not only because they need longer periods of nurturance that depend on adult care (Bogin 1998: 19-23), but because their process towards maturity also depends on how society conceives children. Everyone has been a child once, so everyone has experienced childhood. Our own childhood experiences will be guiding us to understand present children (James 1983); or in other words "our past is present in us as a project and impacts upon our future" (Fabian 1983: 93). The intention of interviewing children individually and participating in their activities was not for me to mimic them, but to allow them to feel more "at ease" with an adult researcher. In this sense, my childhood memories were invaluable for my fieldwork, as it allowed me to grasp the phenomenon of certain aspects of child work, though my own childhood must be considered as different to theirs and not entirely comparable. There was another methodological trap to avoid, the so-called separation of the *other* from *myself*. As James suggests, this entails accepting the importance of the ethnographer as an active participant in gathering "data", becoming then part of the landscape in a very dynamic way. The self of the anthropologist merges with the other selves (James 1993).

The current research is, in part, an extension of my previous fieldwork experiences in Mexico. In 1996 I conducted research within a rural indigenous *Zapotec* community in Northern Oaxaca. The object of that investigation was to study the reproduction of peasant households and the effects of religious interventions upon them. Despite the fact that my previous experience was centred in a rural location, my decision to stay in an urban area was a result of a pragmatic personal decision. This new research, it was hoped, would provide an insight into how children viewed their work. Therefore, it proved necessary to adapt several means for getting their responses (see following sections). Although the subject was not new, I believed that the present research was engaged into an alternative approach. This approach was focused to regard children as the best source of knowledge about their own doings (Jones 2004). Besides, my

knowledge of the rural-indigenous background of the people in Oaxaca city in Monte Alban, I considered would be very useful to this research.

3.2 Children as research topic

From the beginning I was involved in researching children's own experiences in working in their homes. My own experience inspired me to attempt to understand to children in their own right. The fact that I was once a child meant that I had something in common with these children i.e., living as a family member with rights and obligations. However, I was not a child anymore no matter how experienced I was personally with the subject. I was different when being a child in the past; I was still an outsider whose childhood memories had faded by the process of growing up into adulthood. Also, my anthropology training encouraged me to see children in relation to both theories put forward by other anthropologists and sociologists (see also James 1983; Gittins 1998). This produced difficulties when tackling such a delicate area of research. Some of these problems were solved when I examined the material collected and realising the multidimensionality of children's lives and working experiences.

Anthropological and sociological theory provided an insight into understanding and appreciating children from a different point of view (LeVine 1994; Jenks 1996; James et al. 1997; James et al. 1998; Baker 1998; Panter-Brick 1998; Schwartzman 2001). I realised their value as a research participants. After so long a period of being neglected, anthropologists were now approaching children with a more open mind. The contributions of James (1983) and Baker (1998) were a great inspiration to me in choosing the themes and continuing in this line of research. A concept of children's culture is necessary for understanding children as an analytical unit, and not just as part of a broader adult context in society. Later, while conducting fieldwork, this concept proved to be very useful for appreciating that children were different from adults, but also valuable in analytical terms. Children perform and, therefore, influence their environment. To observe their activities and the meanings children give to their environments becomes the culture[s] of children (James 1983: 171). Grasping their daily activities is not only a matter of collecting data, but a way of interacting with the children which is of major importance (ibid.).

Within the classical view of children, based on developmental studies the acts of children are thought to be of little value into understanding social life (see Woodhead 2003 for a critical discussion on children's development). However, in the light of the recent studies of children, the opposite is held to be the case (Jenks 1996; James et al. 1997; James et al. 1998; Montgomery 2003; Stainton-Rogers 2003; Kellet et al. 2004). Children, within this recent approach, are now seen to be actively influencing society, and, also, the way children act and express themselves alters the course of their existence. They recognise themselves as different, but also as active and capable of complying with the pressures of society which are mainly focused on adult points of view. Thus, taking into account that children are competent to generate knowledge of themselves or are regarded as agents in their own right; it is invaluable to consider children as able participants in social research:

An increasing groundswell of opinion supports the view that children are important generating knowledge. Indeed, it can be argued that knowledge about children is incomplete unless it takes into account the knowledge that children have of themselves (Jones 2004: 114).

Therefore this research does not intend merely to mirror the world of children in the colonia Monte Alban, but to examine the testimonies of the children and their families so as to arrive at an understanding of the ways children create, understand and accept or interpret their world (see Cook and Crang 1995: 11).

3.3 Approaching the location

After presenting my research proposal, the next stage was to choose a location with the characteristics of the research questions. Hence, I selected to conduct my fieldwork in this area of Mexico, in Oaxaca, based in various reasons of genuine objective interest and other ones of more personal nature. For the first, accounts the interest I felt when realising of the regularity of children working in most public places in Oaxaca City in previous occasions. The personal reasons, 'time, money and people involved' (Bernard 1995, 106) meant that I could finance my research for the nine months spent and most important, I could approach the people, with whom I later work thanks to sharing the same culture and language by being Mexican. Following

the selection of the location, it was possible to enter the field with the support of the NGO Child to Child (see following section). The only drawback in the beginning was that some participants perceived me as another member of the organisation, which at times made difficult to present my own research plan. However, as time passed by, most people accepted me in my own terms.

For personal and medical reasons I was not able to spend my residence within the *colonia*. In the beginning I was very keen to sleep and share some space in one of the houses of the children. By realising I would not be able to get a good sleep and, therefore, this would inhibit my day's work, I decided to rent a small apartment close to the neighbourhood. During those first few days I had been in the *colonia*, it became clear that I was going to alter most of the daily activities of the people I was supposed to stay with, and affect some of my observations. Later, I spent almost every day in the *colonia*, from early in the morning till late at night, only coming back home to transcribe my notes and sleep.

3.3.1 Informants

The fieldwork became focused on a narrower scale than was my first intention of attempting a comparative study of this *colonia* with the village of my first fieldwork. I centred my goals now on an urban community of Oaxaca City. The *Colonia Monte Alban*, located in the outskirts of the city, which presented some characteristics to focus on child work research. I was introduced to the community through an NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation), known as "*Child to Child*", which happily accepted me as part of their team. From the start, it was necessary to make clear to the people that my presence was not intended as an intrusion into their lives. I was there not to contribute to any improvement for their material lives, or to alleviate their poverty or educate them, as the NGO was already doing this. My only purpose was to examine and understand the problem of child work.

Child to Child was established long before my arrival, working with children in the orbital settlements of Oaxaca and other poor regions of the country. Part of a global organisation, its aim is to educate and guide families towards better health by preventing widespread threatening illnesses. Targeting marginal groups of children is

the strategy followed to eradicate these common illnesses (gastroenteritis, bronchitis and others). Although my presence as researcher was not new, it was certainly different from that *Child to Child* approach. The relationship with the organisation was marginal to the central aim of my research. On the one hand, their personnel were indeed very interested in what I was attempting to do with my fieldwork and on some occasions I was asked to support their training activities. However, due to differences in subject interest, our relationship was amicable rather than professional. On the other hand though, many of my informants had the notion that I was part of the organisation. I explained my aim was rather different and it was not going to interfere with what some of them had already done with the NGO. Not all my informants were involved in the NGO activities. Thus, my sample integrates both people who participated in and those who never participated in the organisation. When my aims were clearly established, adults and teenagers did not mention the organisation again. Younger children were less aware of my separation from *Child to Child*.

In order to select the participants I had to make sure they could understand my research purpose in plain terms. The criterion was to focus on children who work in the domestic sphere and the other as paid workers. Who was better to know about working children than the children themselves? So, I asked around for children who were actively working at the time and had some participation in the NGO, as they trusted me more than the participants who joined later on. Thus, all the children interviewed had participated in an economic activity within the household or had been involved in paid work. The first classification of activities belongs to practices commonly associated with housework, which for many researchers has been perceived as invisible (Ennew & Milne 1989; James et al. 1998; Gittins 1998). Considering domestic activities work as a criterion to include children as participants was not always an easy task, due to local ideas about work. Although these activities prevail and structure daily life, making reproduction possible, they were not always regarded as work, but as help or compulsory assistance. Gradually, through the development of rapport and more in depth-interviewing was possible to grasp the complexity of the notions of work at home and paid labour, by both, children and adults. Thus, domestic activities considered as work include performing chores, running errands, looking after siblings or older people members. This set of activities was carried out by most of the children in the sample. The other kinds of activities are

more subtle and are considered obligatory by the community and are covered by the children's and adults' work. Community commitments are undertaken performed by men adults and children from 12 years and onwards. Community work is performed for the improvement of the infrastructure by giving free help, once in a while in a regular base (*Guelaguetza* or communitarian work). The third group of activities considered as work are performed by children of different ages and gender. Working for money is more common in this classification. However, performing activities under a timetable, being employed or in exchange for services and goods are other types of activities that appear to be carried out by the children.

Most children, 10-16 year olds (some were younger than this cohort), are able to verbalize their feelings. I will present some accounts to see whether younger children express their sense of understanding of a particular topic, and how the environment may play an essential role in contextualising their views. The children in the examples belong to immigrant households of low income. Some of them however live in households of lone-parent households (female-headed) e.g., boys: Fernando, 8; Jaime, 11; Jesus, 15; Damian, 16; or girls as in the case of Sofia, 10 (girl); or extended, .e.g., Jose Alberto, 16; Luis 16 (boys). Most children live in nuclear households with both parents being present e.g., Maricruz, 9 (g);⁴⁷ Irasema, 12 (g); Mariana, 11 (g); Ricardo, 14 (b); Rodrigo, 10 (b); Carolina, 11 (g); Felipe, 13 (b); Rosalia, 15 (g); Antonia, 11 (g); Alicia, 14 (g); Patricia, 10 (g); Lourdes, 13 (g); Remedios, 11 (g). Therefore, by presenting the case examples I want to analyse in a diachronic and synchronic way, the changes that the households have followed, in order to achieve the conditions they were living by the time this research took place. The accounts are supported by a brief profile of the children's biography at the end of this chapter (age, household structure job experience and current activities performed) in order to contextualise the relevance of their testimonies within the analysis discussed.

⁴⁷ (g) girls
(b) boys

The decision not to include younger children than those of my sample was based on the characteristics of the research project (children with labour and domestic experience) and the methodological limitations⁴⁸ I faced from the beginning of the fieldwork (i.e., the decision to discontinue diaries and questionnaires) as I was unable to learn the vocabulary of younger children and adapt myself to their own contextual needs (Fraser, 2004: 17-26). Also, the fact that younger children did not work or had experience was an element not to include them. Based on this, I decided to focus on children from the age of eight and onwards

Parents' and other adults' accounts will be presented in order to provide a more coherent picture of the children's accounts. In terms of the parents' participation, I always had more empathy towards the mothers than the fathers. One reason was my gender position. This limited my interactions with adult men, except for a couple. Despite of the gender differences within the community, the people of the *colonia* tend to discriminate less than in other social milieus. However, when compared with me, this characteristic did not apply to a middle class anthropologist, which they always saw as someone to be treated differently with a mixture of distant respect, reserve and suspicion. Men were the last people to be convinced of my presence within the *colonia*. Eventually, they were also very interested in what was happening during the course of the fieldwork, though their participation was limited due to their lack of availability⁴⁹. Most of them have jobs in the informal sector. Men of the *colonia* usually spend their free time with friends in the *cantinas*⁵⁰, playing football or basketball, betting in the cock fights, or seeking employment. Mothers and other adult women were more accessible. Though on one occasion, the grandmother of one of the children threw me out of her property yelling at me and accusing me of something someone else was to blame for.

⁴⁸ "Competence is defined as having sufficient understanding and intelligence to understand what is proposed' and 'sufficient discretion to enable [a child] to make a wise choice in his or her own interests'" (Gillick 1985, cited in Alderson & Morrow 2004: 99)

⁴⁹ I could not follow fathers openly to their daily activities. Although I met and chatted with many of them on the streets, it is considered to be improper for a young single woman to socialize with men in open and public spaces. I preferred to interview them in their own houses

⁵⁰ Cantinas used to be bars for people of the poor classes. Today they have become an exotic place of amusement for tourists and local intellectuals. Therefore, some of these poor men are losing these public spaces for "recreation" and they drink in parks, streets or cars. Public alcohol drinking is forbidden in Mexico.

3.3.2 Sampling

Though my sample may not appear to be typical, because of the *Oaxacan* marginal society, the cases and results presented here are consistent and represent tendencies of a community in which its characteristics are depicted and interpreted in this thesis. This sample has been narrowed down from a larger one in order to obtain a coherent subset of observations and interviews which represent the majority of the material collected during my fieldwork. This subset of information, on which I focus my analysis on, has been refined in such a way that my conclusions and comparisons can be easily and confidently extrapolated to the broader population of the marginal urban Oaxaca.

I chose a few families to work with as *non-random* sample or *judgment sampling*. Choosing these first participants was based on the relationships and rapport I established with them during an evaluation period (Bernard 1995: 95). The main principle to use this kind of sampling was to select the participants who in a first instance were or knew children currently working. Although I first interviewed people from the NGO, they introduced me to families of working children. Then, as it was not possible to interview these children immediately, I had to interview their parents and later the children themselves (to also obtain consent). From that point, I realised that in order to accomplish my goal, I had to contemplate the inclusion of adults and other agents besides children.

The rest of the families I interviewed became involved with my research as a result of the links they had with the first ones, following a *snowball* strategy (Bernard 1995: 97). The data was collected from direct observation and interviews. From a study of 50 children (between the ages of 8 to 16) and their families, using a consistent methodological approach, I obtained material generated on a total of 14 households. As already mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, there were significant financial, time and spatial limitations. I had to tackle many practical issues in order to obtain a representative sample of persons and events. I also managed to collect data from a much larger number of people, which I used to contextualise the information for the 14 households that provide the focus of his study (cf. INEGI, *Science por colonias* 2004). These 14 households represented the locus of the community life

which revolves mainly around seeking for ways to survive, economically on a day to day basis (see table 2 below). The additional material I had collected supports this fact.

Although in the beginning I wanted to have an equal number of boys and girls and between the ages of 10 to 15 years in my sample; it was modified due to children's own definitions of work and age. So, I decided to include children that were contributing not only with an income, but also the children that alleviated parents from certain domestic activities and gave them time to do something else to sustain their household condition (Schildkrout 1981). Though young children were not always as verbal as the older ones, they also expressed, by acting, some negotiating attitudes to work through the interactions with other household members, e.g., obedience, disobedience.

Of the 50 children I interviewed, 15 were teenagers, between 13 and 16 years old; of whom 9 were boys and 6 were girls. In the group of children, between the ages of 8 and 12 the gender division was more equal, 17 boys and 18 girls (find attached a diagram with some of the children's profiles at the end of this chapter). I included 16 year olds who at the time had had some years of working experience I found valuable to include in the research. Older children are thought to be more productive by their parents and other adults, and are also legally recognised and allowed to work with parental permission. Teenagers' attitudes to their siblings and other children showed a particular closeness that I did not expected to observe. They were not only looking after them, but playing, guiding, and showing strong links with them. This was a determining characteristic that once again proved that certain institutional separation of childhood was not applicable to them (Gittins 1998; Kenny 1997). It was another sign of a community struggling to keep more egalitarian in an urban environment characterised by its great socio-economic differences.

Table 2. Selection of sample

Objective	Selection	Participants	
		Number of participants	Characteristics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children aged 8-16 • Boys and girls. • Children working at least 10 hours a day⁵¹ • Work comprising of domestic or paid activities, formal and informal market • Children's cash contribution was not necessary, time and in kind exchanges were also important • Children of the same neighbourhood. • Children combining school and work • Children relieving adult members of the household to allow them to engage in labour. • Ability of children to verbalize present and past experiences of work • Compare children's and adults working experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After approaching NGO, group invitation • First children and families volunteer to work • The other children and their families were contacted through the first participants • Application of monitoring questionnaires to evaluate children's main activities and other family members sources of income (children's name, age, birth place, school year, family size, activities of the parents or other adult members, no. of siblings and activities, migration) • Children were selected according to the answers obtained in these questionnaires and in the first interviews • Some children did not have any experience working either at home or in paid employment. They did not participate in the sample • Most parents of the children and other relatives participated in the interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Originally, around 70 children answered the questionnaires, but did not want to participate • In total, 50 children participated in the research as the supportive sample • 15 children between 13 and 16 years old; of which: 9 were boys and 6 were girls • Children: between the ages of 8 and 12 the gender division was more equal: 17 boys and 18 girls • Primary sample constitutes of 10 boys and 10 girls aged 8-16 • Younger children, under the age of 8, were not selected as they did not have working experience; they were mostly cared by older ones • Adults working experiences with some direct relationship to children, i.e., consanguine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The children selected had past and present working experience. • All paid jobs were located in the informal labour market • Household as the focal point to locate working children. • Productive activities comprised of domestic paid and unpaid work and of paid employment. • Contributions to household reproduction in cash and kind and time invested • Children's working timetables varied according to school and adults' working hours • All children are first generation of rural immigrants • Children participation in household reproduction and community work: productive and ritual • Adults' productive activities were recorded

During the first few days, I found it relatively easy to establish rapport with my first group of informants (three of the households) who were similar to other families in the neighbourhood with the profile that I was seeking for, i.e., mainly with working children in paid jobs. I decided to visit their homes accompanied by one of the NGO members, and introduce myself. Some of them agreed to be interviewed, others were

⁵¹ This criteria changed during the analysis of data due to the results obtained, see chapter 5 for discussion.

more cautious about my intentions, but most of them, in the end, became an active part of the research. I found it easier to follow the snowball strategy, due to the nature of my research topic (Bernard 1995: 97). The main question I was asking, in order to gain access to a major number of informants, was a simple one: I queried whether the children in the neighbourhood who were currently working contribute to their household's income in cash. Another critical element was the parents' labour background during their childhood. Therefore, all the parents involved in this research had work experience during their childhood years, which influenced their present views about their own offspring's' labour experience. From initial approaches to this category of family I was able to meet other families sharing the comparable background.

One of the major difficulties in locating and selecting my sample was to understand the local definitions of working children. There is the tendency to undermine the productive activities of children as valuable and then worthy to be considered work. Then, I had to make very clear the characteristics of the elements, which I was investigating in order to invite other participants. Gradually, people understood my aims and were able to identify by themselves some of the elements of the research, and then accepted to participate.

3.3.3 Observation and participant observation

After a month of exploration, sampling and observation, I was able to conduct participant observation among the children first and, later, with the adults.

In conducting participant observation, I interacted with the household members by participating in their everyday routines which included the organisation of productive activities, the recreational times and certain crisis moments. Most of all, to access information I could not have otherwise obtain some of the depictions informants made of themselves during structured interviews (Bernard 1995: 139). Two of the risks of being a native researcher are to take for granted cultural issues and getting involved passionately in situations out of the researcher's control (see Bernard 1995: 154). However, by not being my first fieldwork conducted in my own society allowed me to have some sense of distance, but most important, belonging to a different generation

allowed me to create some balance between taken for granted assumptions and integrating children's testimonies from their generational views (see Mayall 2000, cited in Jones 2004: 123). I learned to behave in such a way that allowed me to intrude as little as possible into their routines, without losing sight of what I was observing and collecting (Spradley 1980). From the start, I found that participant observation was the most useful method to approach the children and their families; after trying a simple questionnaire and the record of diaries that did not produce the results I had expected. Children were not keen to keep written records or diaries, because they linked it to school activities, which for most of them were rather "unpleasant" activities. Thus, as not to pressurise children, but to adapt and negotiate techniques that suited their likes and disposition, I decided to follow an alternative method by organising the weekend meetings where they felt able to talk, paint and discuss without restraint, having some time to play as a way of recompense.

3.3.4 Informal, unstructured and semi-structured interviews

Informal interviews were conducted during the first stages of my fieldwork and continued over the whole period of fieldwork. They were very useful when meeting people casually or when a topic would emerge unexpectedly. For instance, on one occasion, I was walking to the colonia and I met one of my informants, Felipe. He started a conversation related to the previous interview, but he offered some new information. Felipe and I had had a series of unstructured interviews at his house, before he started working with his father as a wall painter. He had worked as a cleaner in his own school and as a construction assistant, and when I casually met him the first time he told me of his new job. However, when I met him accidentally, he talked about being tired, but feeling mature and ready to be independent soon, in about a year's time. Felipe had been working for some time since my first interview. As I was not ready to record the introductory interviews, I had to remember the information and transcribe it into my diary, which later provided me with the opportunity to continue interviewing him and his family. The above incident shows that many informants would choose to give me information outside the normal interview sessions, either because they were not willing to open up immediately or because we would focus on other issues. However, when I met them on later occasions they would provide more input. This led to a mosaic of scattered information that I had to

compile to obtain a more coherent and complete picture that emerged of the children in this study. Although a resourceful technique to access information in almost any situation, informal interviews also imply other weaknesses. For instance, not being able to use my notes, or when some situations out of my control would interrupt the flow of the interview withdrawing informants from continuing talking in the specific issue.

3.3.4.1 Unstructured interviews

As Bernard (1995) points out, anthropologists have taken for granted unstructured interviews because they are the means of obtaining most of the primary data (Bernard 1995: 208). This was the case in my fieldwork collection of data, especially from that of adult women who were always keen to talk about specific topics while cooking, or doing other domestic chores. I was able either to give them a hand, or just to stay out of their way and ask questions now and then. In the beginning, I also conducted this type of interview with the children, particularly when they approached me to ask questions about my own work. I was able to answer most of their questions telling them about my plans to write a book about them, which gave an excellent start when interviewing them. The difficulties in conducting this kind of interviews are centred in the daily process of ordering information, which I would not gathered in a single interview. Various interviews were necessary, negotiating time and themes with the participants.

3.3.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

Later, I conducted some semi-structured interviews with adults who were busy working or absent most of the time i.e., fathers, teachers and some employers. The format was usually framed from what I had learned previously from other members of the domestic unit, or the children. I interviewed seven fathers, three teachers and two employers using a semi-structured interview approach. Topics covered included their own labour experience, their migration background and their labour qualifications, elements which affected their present positions at work, their economic roles in their households and their attitude towards children productive roles. However, using this technique it was not always possible to confirm some information from the primary

source, this selected informants were usually busy to make appointments for more than one occasion.

At a later stage, I conducted semi-structured interviews by suggesting a particular topic e.g., “Do you remember when you were the same age as Alicia is now?” and the informant, in this case Pablo, Alicia’s father, would start relating his memories about his teen years: “That is a long time ago... I suffered a lot during those years because I was far away from my family...” I raised other topics: life history of the adults, comparison between adults’ and children’s work experiences, the ways both felt towards children’s present lives, children’s responses to work, and daily performance, kind of work, time spent, income or other gratifications received. Around about the mid period of my fieldwork, I conducted structured interviews for the same topics by offering some simple questionnaires to the children. These were answered during the course of one of the weekly reunions. They mainly consisted of their impressions about work and family life, of qualitative nature rather than reflecting statistical tendencies of the community. So, I opted for more a more qualitative approach in generating data from in-depth interviews and observant participation, rather than using questionnaires in further stages of fieldwork.

3.3.5 Recording the interviews

Most of the unstructured and informal conversations were tape-recorded. I always requested permission from every person I interviewed to use my tape recorder from children and adults alike. Conducting interviews in domestic situations, it proved to be more difficult than interviewing the children separately, as children, usually, were present during the interviews with adults, so it was rather hard to keep control of my notebook. Their inquisitive glances and curiosity about the things I was writing, often became another problem for me. Children knew I was writing “something about them”. Therefore, they felt that they had the right to look at my notes. A tape recorder became more useful than the notes at certain times. It was also intrusive, but children took it more humorously than the notes. They wanted to play with it, to record their own voices and especially to hear their distorted voices with disbelief and amusement.

3.3.6 Data and analysis of data

Throughout the duration of my fieldwork, I started to classify and cross reference the information obtained and transcribed from my diary, field notes and interviews⁵². It was coded according to the participants' personal details, the date and the topics of every interview. Interview information coding was inspired by the Murdock OCM Outline of Cultural Materials (Murdock, 1971), or the Murdock Guide (ibid). However, as some of the categories are not mirrored in the guide, I had to elaborate my own codes or sub-codes, especially when the categories were more specific than the ones described in the guide.⁵³ A diary and a series of archives were organised by the categories obtained and registered using a word processor. Daily notes and audio records were transcribed and coded accordingly (i.e. to participant interview).

Tracing migration, interviews of adults and family members of other generation were conducted as to follow patterns between households and generations. At the same time, this information was compared to and combined with the qualitative data offered by the children about their impressions on migration. For understanding social networks, I followed a more rudimentary approach, before realising I was obtaining valuable information on this subject. As I interviewed various individuals involved in the work of children, it was possible to envisage how important some of these individuals were for children, not only to obtain, maintain or continue jobs or other productive activities, but also as a source of support during difficult times. This was only clear, after the analysis of the interviews material. A classification per topics was designed to register kinds of work or occupation and themes related. Thus, it was possible to obtain a clearer view of the thinking of work as constructed rather than determined only by time spend or retribution made (cf. Boyden et al. 1998).

⁵² Data was mostly qualitative, because children did not have fixed time-tables, stable earnings, or established labour relationships. Though some quantitative information was collected, it is not central to the analysis presented here.

⁵³ A number of categories were registered, comprising demography (16 in the OCM) age, gender, birth position, birth place, migration experience, labour (46), current main occupation, past occupations, literacy, characteristics of the household (such as type of house construction, number of rooms, furniture), or economic (such as work (labour 46), division of labour within the household, salaries or other income types), and domestic activities (such as routine chores, activities for production and those ones allowing adults to work, etcetera).

In later stages, the data underwent comparative analysis, and in a lesser degree descriptive analysis. Comparing the data collected between participants to patterns and my own theoretical assumptions allowed me to create a map of the characteristics of working children in Monte Alban (Bernard 1995, 360-361). The above analytical approaches were used to understand, for instance, statements on particular issues that were or not supported by patterns encountered in structured and informal interviews (coded) when obtaining family and individual working histories. Comparing on the one hand the patterns found, such as migration, and the experiences that these events or patterns meant for the participants, were crucial to understand the importance of intergenerational relationships in the children's working experiences (as type of occupation), and their own views on it.

Gradually, it became possible to follow a more structured research approach. I observed a pattern in the colonia characterised by its large number of working children within the neighbourhood and the city. I found, also, a continuation of this pattern from previous generations to the present. So, the information collected in later stages, focused on adult's own memories on their own work experience as children, and those of children themselves, as to compare them in a diachronic analysis. The parents' memories of their own migration and working experiences support a comparative analysis of work between the two (or three in some cases) generations in the households. Another factor influencing short term activities was the way in which children perceive themselves as contributors to their families' income or co-providers. In the absence of the father (see below), who is traditionally perceived as the major provider and family protector, children feel obliged to contribute to their household's income. Mothers were in charge of performing the main economic activity, followed by the older children and assisted at home by the younger members.

In placing the community observed into a larger socio-economic complex i.e., State, children, especially teenagers, and the adults felt abandoned by the state policies which failed to assist them to tackle their poverty. The failure of the state was observed, according to them, in the lack of available jobs for people with low qualifications. This was the result of a shortage of education opportunities for adults and the limitations of the job market to provide informal activities. Thus, it was the case that children had more opportunities than the adults for getting jobs, but they

would still need to strive to find better jobs if they wanted to stay in Oaxaca City. To approach young children my strategy was less elaborated and focused on their perceptions of everyday life, related to survival and production within their domestic units and their employment.

The entire compilation of information gathered during my fieldwork, which was outlined in the research proposal, covered the following main topics,

1) Household composition structure, residence, and the collection of genealogies. This information refers to the type of household arrangement (nuclear, extended, matrilocal, and so on). I found out also that there were a significant number of domestic units where the father was absent mainly due to international migration, and where he was not anymore contributing to the main income. Female headship was very common among my sample and this was representative of the wider community. Other arrangements included three generations living in the same household and sharing the income. Apparently, nuclear family arrangement seemed to be the most common in my sample, but due to the male spatial frequent mobility, this arrangement tended to be non-stable.

2) Domestic productive, reproductive and organisational task by gender and age, including differential status, privileges and responsibilities. In this case, the data was organised so as to combine activities within the household with the activities generating income. I noted differences in the narratives of what the members of each household expected of themselves and what actually they were achieving. One of those differences was the status of the head of the family and the actual contribution to the household income. Mothers, especially, always maintained that the husbands were offering the major amount of money. However, it was observed during the interviews that women were major contributors. Only during stressful times would women confess their role as principal breadwinners; at other times accepted their secondary status as women in a patriarchal society (cf. Chant 1988).

3) Decision-making about household contributions. Adults made most of the decisions within the households, even those of sending a child out to work. Children when reaching their teens appeared to gain some voice in negotiating a place and state

their opinion in their household issues, mainly concerned with income re-distribution, authority and leisure activities.

Other relevant topics included: 4) employment and income contribution (expenditure on food and other goods); 5) government assistance to families; 6) meanings of work and childhood, 7) family discourses on identity; 8) play and leisure 9) life histories of adults' childhood memories and cross-generational analysis of narratives; 10) the influence of mass media, state policies, rural-urban migration and social mobility in the perceptions of children's work. I recorded and interviewed most of the members of the same household in order to confirm some information and to note differences and patterns in the responses to the same questions.

3.4 Children in their households

Examining life histories allowed me to overlap two different generations. The main aim was to recognize changes in perceptions of the children's role in household contribution to the income and the relationships that sustain differences and sharing elements in the labour experience. These two elements, perceptions and relationships, allowed me to analyse the way children actively build up their sense of belonging through their status within their family.

In perceiving themselves as under the control of others, it was towards the end of fieldwork that I realised the importance of allocating authority as a determining element in configuring the distribution of work within the household and the conflicts that arose from exerting it. Authoritarian events, such as parents demanding silence or requesting errands from the children, or influencing children's testimonies observed during my informal and semi-structured interviews, provided impetus to seek more information on the subject. Thus, I concentrated my efforts on understanding the negotiations which took place when children attempted to solve some of the contradictions and to gain some benefits when dealing with adults' authority. I found it important to concentrate on the household as a study unit along with child work. I believed this to be suitable for the purposes of my research because the children targeted were located in a household environment that guided them, and bonded them to it. As was explained in chapter 1, the analysis unit concentrated on is the

household, although emphasis has been placed on the children's work. Therefore, I included for the case studies all household members' impressions about the subject. None of the children interviewed were living separately like street children (Leñero 1998; see also Taracena & Tavera 2000), I decide to interview parents, children, relatives and some friends and neighbours as important members of a social network that makes survival possible in the *colonia*.

The children of this research were not living independently from their families and other relatives. In their everyday routine, they were participating actively in fulfilling the household's domestic and economic needs. As Sanjek (1982) states "households are the staging area of social life" where the participants act in order to maintain, regulate and provide continuity to their lives, based on their actions. Without doubt, the domestic relationships affect the performance of all members, which is a basic principle to maintain within the scope of this study.

The household is also relevant in analytical terms, because it is the centre where children obtain economic and emotional support, and where they learn acceptable behaviour within the wider culture of the community. I could not conduct research without taking into account the rest of the household. Children in this context are not isolated. Also, in terms of analysis, contemplating the family relationships results in a more fruitful and complete picture. Only street children, those that actually live on the streets, are studied in terms of their independence from their families, but to understand many of the origins of this phenomenon, family roots and links still have to be investigated (James 1983).

When attesting to the importance of the household in the children's attitude towards their work experience, differential relationships within the household are another factor to aid understanding the dynamics of household survival. Gonzalez de la Rocha (1994) suggests that analysing conflict and negotiation allow us to recognize the contradictions within the household:

Households are the social units where many actions and decisions take place, especially those concerning the areas of internal divisions of labour, consumption and education, just to mention a few. Individual and collective

interests are not always the same, and decisions are not always taken with rational objectives (ibid. 14).

Children are involved in these differential relationships, where the authority of one or two persons determines how relationships develop: in sharing food, affection, domestic tasks, work loads, etc. For instance, children like women, in poor social contexts, tend to receive fewer goods after the bulk is divided and shared out. They may be served the last, and may be given small and less nutritious portions than the adult men of the household, as it was demonstrated by Kenny (1997) in her study in Brazil and by Gonzalez de la Rocha in Mexico (1994). In my own field experience I also observed these differential relationships between children and adult members, and even between older and younger siblings. Nevertheless, children strived to locate themselves in better situations, even when they were important contributors to the household survival: for instance, by resorting to neighbours' help.

3.5 Other children's places

I observed children at different times including at school (I went to see them at school a few times) and also, when they were supposed to be at school but were not, as they were working or taking care of the house and the younger siblings. I visited some of the places they were working: the streets, the market, the central square and the house when doing domestic work. I interviewed their teachers and employers, though most of the children were working alongside or under the control of their parents. Information about children's responses to work and other non-labour activities were obtained directly. I observed daily responses to ordinary activities in order to gain awareness of the kind of negotiations in which children were engaged. The aim was to understand how children negotiate with them to gain either control or advantages in a disadvantageous relationship with the adults.

3.6 Sunday meetings

Every Sunday I had group gatherings with the children on their own. The local guide and other residents of the house where the reunions took place were always present. Lola, a young woman in her mid-twenties was always there to help me with the children's activities. In the beginning, I gave the children some notebooks for them to

keep a diary. However, after three non-productive weekends, it proved to be useless, as the children were not used to writing, except for their brief homework, and the information given was rather minimal and not relevant to my topic of interest. Thus, I changed my strategy to one of approaching the children by talking to them in the group and trying to integrate them in a more dynamic relationship. During these gatherings I provided them different topics in order to monitor their responses. The thematic subjects contemplated, among others, were: family life, their domestic work, their impressions about other children's work and children's rights, disobedience, schooling and parents' jobs. I wanted to compare their answers with the ones from individual interviews and those of their parents. Some of them corresponded to each other and it was interesting to observe the contrasts between what children thought of these subjects, how they expressed themselves in their work, and the ways adults expect them to act. I had constantly to distinguish between the expressed view of the community and the actual actions and reactions to these issues. It was sometimes intriguing to search for the factual events and responses behind the everyday routine that involved children's acts and discourses. Narrative accounts, despite these not being the central issue here, are relevant to understanding the differences between my observations and what people expected from others and themselves in order to fulfil in a social determinant subject, i.e., their daily family roles.

Some of the drawbacks of these meetings were the limitation of time, (they usually lasted around an hour), and the difficulty in maintaining children's interest for longer. Having a mixed age group of children was sometimes a disadvantage, which made it difficult to focus on older children. Despite the fact that from the beginning I made it clear what kind of children were invited to these groups, in the end I could not reject the younger children, as they were usually younger siblings of the older ones. This became a bit of a problem when trying to obtain answers and organise play activities with the older group. Noise, tears and complaints were constant elements of the Sunday group. However, Lola and Luis (the former being the owner of the house, and the latter, one a teenager) were always willing to look after and play with the younger children, which was very helpful. At the end of the sessions, as they were used to playing with the *Child to Child* guides, I just adjusted myself to the same play routine and so the children found themselves receiving something back in exchange for their time.

The activities carried out with the children were very instructive and indicative of their own household experiences. These activities comprised drawing, reading stories and providing oral descriptions of their week's experiences. They drew themselves at home, working, at school, and with me. I read some stories in order to provoke their reactions and start discussions, stories such as *Oliver Twist* and some others in a Mexican context e.g., "Indigenous stories for children" of anonymous various authors. At the beginning of their oral accounts of their daily lives, they were rather shy and found it very hard to express themselves, but in the following later sessions they learned from each other to be more confident and open. Some of them could not hide their emotions when they were re-living again of some of their anecdotes. At the end of the sessions, individually they were happy to talk to me about whatever was troubling them.

Girls of all ages and older boys were always keen to talk to me separately. Stories about disobedience and misbehaviour were a constant theme in these confidential chats. Children complained about their family problems, they also sought for comfort. I was always put in a very challenging position when they asked advice, as I did not want to cause any trouble with their parents. Usually I tried to encourage them to explain themselves as much as possible, instead of solving their problems.

3.7 Photographs

People in this environment love portraits. Although my aim was to take pictures of children doing their work and their daily activities, I managed to take some family portraits and some other pictures of children in their daily activities. With a 35mm camera I bought for the children, Luis, one of the teenager boys, took snaps of the younger children; when they were at school during the break time (teachers did not allow them to interrupt their classes). Besides the portraits requested, the teenagers took pictures of themselves having fun. They could not associate photography with work. For them, as I was told by the teenagers, photography was an instrument to show relaxation and fun, not work and responsibility. Therefore, this technique was eventually discontinued because it was seen as opposed to their own views of photography and of themselves. Some people felt diminished in capturing some moments they do not consider their show their best. Some of the photographs children

took were portraits, elements that did not support my aim of depicting children working seen by them. Therefore for ethical and practical considerations I did not pursue this technique further.

3.8. Confidentiality and informed consent

In reference to people's permission to be interviewed I sought to obtain informed consent from both adults and children alike at the same time. This means, that children and parents were physically present when I state my first queries about their participation. This was obtained usually during my first visits where I explained besides the purpose and the way I was to conduct my fieldwork that their identities were to be kept safe. Also, this was sought when facing to access new fields of interest and then was my duty to offer comprehensive explanations about the intentions and used of the information.

Children and adults, particularly when belonging to families gave me their permission to interview them and participate in some of their activities when they were together. Children were not asked for their participation separately, without adult consent. But, I also approached children seeking to validate their own opinions and issues with respect to the research.

Taking in consideration the participants right to confidentiality, to safeguard the integrity and identity of participants, particularly of children, I have replaced their real names with pseudonyms. Participants were aware of this commitment from the beginning of my fieldwork and agreed to participate based on this condition.

All interviews were conducted in Spanish. So, citations have been translated to English and the ones presented here have been selected as symptomatic of the local realities of working children. Where Spanish terms and quotations are presented, they are marked in italics and translations are specified when necessary. The age of adults is not always stated at the end of some quotations, as some of them did not want to disclose it. Quotations have been edited in order to support the analysis presented throughout the thesis, without resting or undermining informant's testimonies, their significance and representation (see also Bernard 1995: 363-365).

3.9 Reciprocity

Children and families expected something in return for their cooperation with me. As in my previous fieldwork experiences, people of poor backgrounds always have doubts regarding the intentions of the researcher. Why someone would be interested in people that have nothing but economic problems as their main characteristic? If someone shows some kind of interest, it is because they have something to offer him/her in return. This is very a common attitude associated with government institutions. They conduct brief research to learn about the immediate needs of families in order to support them in material terms: they offer school meals, food baskets, to pave their streets, to install sewage or water pipes and to open schools or educational centres, just to mention but a few. However, often the people studied do not see any results of these studies. This was one of the strongest doubts children and adults had about the aim of my research. In time they simply got used to seeing me frequently and forgot about my stated purpose and in what I said about myself. They accepted me because I became friends with most of them, and that I was not only someone asking things and intruding into their lives, but someone who also listened to their daily problems. Acting as a confidante was never in my mind, but it resulted from the rapport established (see also Kellet et al. 2004: 166). I could not detach myself from their personal accounts, and in the end, it proved to be useful at a certain level (there were many conversations that did not have to do simply with my interest, but were part of the relationship). A promise of confidentiality within the community was another factor to get closer to them.⁵⁴

3.10 Ethical and methodological problems encountered

As Fraser (2004, 19) points out, ethical issues in conducting research with children have to consider and regard the interest of the actors involved and how the findings can affect them. In terms of the ethical and methodological problems faced, there was the constant question of the suitability of the research to solve present economical problems from the adult point of view. This was a theme I could not separate from the

⁵⁴ From the initial stages of my research, I requested verbal consent from every household involved. I fully explained the purpose of this and in most cases families agreed to participate. Some households participated throughout my fieldwork, and only one of them declined to continue their participation after a few weeks due to medical reasons (see also Masson 2004: 48-50).



main research objective, and that somehow supported and framed the actor's accounts and social context. I was only able to be sympathetic to their needs by listening to their complaints. Sometimes I had to agree with what they were expressing in great terms: the economical downturns and the lack of resources for people like them. Children on the other hand were also able to intervene in these conversations, sometimes with their parents support; sometimes they were discouraged and silenced by them. Inevitably, poverty was a permanent theme in the interviews and, therefore, I have to emphasise it in this thesis. Children gained more active participation as adults understood that the research required integral participation of both, children and adults.

Another problem I faced was the age and class difference. Children always classified me as someone "richer" and "more sophisticated" than them. I could not do much to offer another image in the beginning. This judgement was a source of anxiety for me as it was probably for them. Popularly, people from Mexico City are believed to be better off than the rest of the Mexican citizens (see also Shaharani 1994). The only strategy I could follow to diffuse to try to behave contrary to this assumed status, more than expressing convincing words. Trying to adapt my self to their community, learn their vocabulary (Fraser 2004: 24). It worked until the day I left. So, my initial identity of researcher in a way melted away and the one of a friend arose. Questions of how people acted and lived in Mexico City disappeared, to be replaced with more personal and casual questions about me and my family. This gave me the opportunity on various occasions to return many of the same questions towards them. As I realised in all my fieldwork experience and my own personal life, people, and particularly children always want to be listened to (Narayan 1993).

3.10.1 Other ethical considerations: power relationships between adult researcher and child participants.

Among the aims of conducting research with children is to report and analyse views related to children's worlds and to strive to understand these from the children's perspectives (Fraser 2004, Masson 2004). In doing so, the researcher has to keep an open mind to adapt his/her methods to the needs of the research aims, but mostly to negotiate with children as participants which have an active voice (James et al 1998:

190; Alderson & Morrow 2004; Alderson 2004). From this perspective, developing suitable research techniques in conducting my own fieldwork required me to rethink the approach I was taking on and about children. It was crucial to gradually reshape traditional ethnographic methods, that suited to organize and obtain data worthy to analyse, without miss-interpreting children's views, yet creating a "...mutually respectful ethical relationship during project develop" (Alderson & Morrow 2004: 22). Changing the view of children as subjects of research to children as participants, was one the first aspects in approaching my young participants (Masson 2004: 44, James et al. 1998). As Priscilla Alderson (2004: 98) states, children have the same right as adults do, to participate in research that directly concerns them and not to rely only on adults' views and statements. Thus, contrasting or comparing children and adult views enriched the research in many levels.

In terms of power relationships, it was unavoidable to confront the differences of age, gender and class. There is always an implicit power differential in the relationships between the researcher and the informants, particularly if these are children. Considering children as participants rather than objects of research minimises at some degree these initial differences (Christensen & Prout 2002:480, quoted in Robinson & Kellet 2004: 85). Already in our societies, there is the concomitant relationship of power between adults and children based on experience and other cultural values (Robinson & Kellet 2004). So, in order to establish a fairer relationship, to reduce the power differences (Morrow & Richards 1996), it was necessary to negotiate the way data was collected. Therefore children provided information by taking an active role when proposing thematic discussions and activities, rather than just answering questionnaires (James et al. 1998: 190; Fraser 2004: 16). This position was chosen due to the more qualitative approach sustained in this research as to concede an active role to children (Beresford 1997). It is worthy of mention that one aspect of ethnographic research is that the ethnographer has to maintain a certain level on naiveté, in order to be open to the understanding of the society studied (Bernard 1995). This includes working with children. Although, naturally, I was never going to get into the world of children as such, it was essential to keep always in mind that I had just partial knowledge of what I was investigating. Despite being academically literate in the subject, the real experts were the children of my sample. According to Giddens (1995: 54, cited in Robinson and Kellet 2004: 81), power is defined as

[...] The ability of individuals or groups to make their own concerns count, even when other's resist. Power sometimes involves the direct use of force, but is almost always accompanied by the development of ideas (ideologies) which justify the actions of the powerful'.

But as Robinson and Kellet point out, power is also about creating knowledge. Based then on the premise that 1) children are the experts in their own lives and 2) that anthropologists have to place themselves as naïve individuals of the world they are trying to understand, then in my research was paramount to view children as creating knowledge. Hence, power relationships, although they never totally disappear, can be minimised and constantly negotiated.

My experience conducting fieldwork with children was not easy at times. Trying on to obtain valuable data that suited my aims, and on to maintain a non-invasive, undermining, or unfair relationship, proved to be a constant challenge. Trained in a more traditional school of anthropology, I had to reevaluate constantly my approach, first by re-thinking, my own ideas about children, and then by daily measuring the benefits and disadvantages of my approach when establishing rapport with children (Alderson & Morrow 2004). The most important goal, besides obtaining data to create a report in understanding working children, was to make children speak for themselves, while respecting and protecting them. From the beginning, I stated that it was out of my control to improve their livelihood standards with my research alone (ibid. 66). People clearly understood the scope of the project, and felt valued by being taking into account. Children were also explained with examples of what kind of impact their participation could have, the importance of their inclusion. What children valued the most was the idea of working with them, even though no kind of result was going to have a direct impact in their lives. Being listened to on their daily doings and thoughts was something many other adults did not do⁵⁵, thus, children really valued me listening to them. Children were not always willing to talk, particularly when discussions were related to adult-children relationships, so, I had to consult both the parent and child if we had to talk separately. Sometimes I had to postpone the

⁵⁵ Except for some individuals involved in social networks, or other significant relationships, see chapters 6 & 7,

interview to the time after the group reunions, when I had the opportunity to talk individually to some of these children. These talks were at times not only about specific work issues, but also about children facing problems at school, with their siblings and parents.

Initially, it was a process of trial and error for me. Some techniques did not seem to work very well for most children in the beginning. After presenting the scope my research and consulting with children and their families, I asked about them keeping records in diaries. They were keen to do so, young children more than the older ones. However, after three or four times I checked on the diaries of every child, I realised that they were willing to talk more than to write about their daily activities. Older children were even less willing to write, they preferred to spend time with their friends than to sit down and write about things they regarded as “boring”. So, I discontinued diaries for all of them and opted for group interviews and individual interviews. I did not insist further as not to pressurise them and instead asked if conversations were best for them, as they agreed.

In developing interview and research strategies in order to gradually assess the information obtained, it was possible to understand the active role children have in creating and participating in their own worlds. Places and situations where they are not passive subjects, but active individuals through a variety of experiences, are positive or negative and have an impact on their surrounding world, sometimes to their own benefit and at times creating uncertainty.

3.11 Conclusions

Within this chapter, I have described my methodological approach and highlighted the practical issues concerning the quality and quantity of my observations. Moreover, I have referred briefly to the characteristics and attitudes of my subjects and I will be discussing these aspects further throughout the thesis. The bulk of the material comprises of a series of personal accounts collected from the children and their families through interviews, especially designed to overcome the practical limitations of the environment and my research. Data quality and quantity is always an issue for empirical research. The attitude adopted for my fieldwork was to let children speak

for themselves, learn their language and not to influence the interviewees and to rely on the use of simple questionnaires requiring direct answers to set questions. In this respect, I believe my approach to be effective and to shed some light on serious social problems which, to a certain extent, has been overlooked.

Chapter 4

Fieldwork setting: domestic organisation for survival in the colonia Monte Alban

4. Introduction

The first part of this chapter describes the settlement of *colonia*⁵⁶ Monte Alban, where my fieldwork took place, the characteristics of the community and the households. This settlement has much in common with other dispersed settlements in Latin America as it is populated by rural immigrants, reflects a socio-cultural and economic transition between rural and urban ways of life. It has much in common with the run-down areas of the Mexican cities and their shanty towns. In endeavouring to adjust to a new environment, households strive to locate themselves within the highly competitive labour market. Child work takes place in various activities, both within the household and the outside community.

In the following sections, I present detailed depiction of the households of my sample. I portray the living conditions observed and the performance of their members in a typical day. Also, I want to offer some of the impressions of the dwellers themselves in their struggle for coping with daily needs. There is a comprehensive description of adults and children's activities and a typical routine day.

4.2 Location

4.2.1 The settlement: Colonia Monte Alban

Colonia Monte Alban, which took its name from the adjacent archaeological site, about three kilometres north of the settlement, has a population of some 3467 inhabitants (*Science por colonias*, INEGI 2000). The settlement is one of the many irregular settlements that have expanded irregularly around Oaxaca City, within the last three decades. It is located about three kilometres to the west, along the federal road that leads to the Monte Alban archaeological site. The settlement has one of the most impressive views over the city. However, it is unsuitable for urban growth, due

⁵⁶ From here on I refer to *Colonia Monte Alban* only as the *colonia*

to the mountainous, uneven terrain, which makes access difficult. The lack of urban planning in the colonia Monte Alban contrasts with the colonial style symmetry of the old Oaxaca city. *Donaji* street is one of the main roads where most of public life evolves. It crosses in the whole colonia from east to west and joins two other main streets *Pinopia* and *Cosijopi*. The pre-school, the primary school and the Catholic church are located in this area. The only paved road is the *carretera federal* or federal road, which leads from west to the north of the settlement. Most of my informants lived in *Donaji* and *Pinopia* streets in the northern area of the settlement (see Fig. 1).

The area occupied by colonia Monte Alban used to be agricultural land before being expropriated by the INAH (National Institute of Anthropology and History) in order to preserve the site from unauthorised incursions and looting. This colonia comprises (Fig. 2) a group of illegal settlements that started to grow during the 1970s on the outskirts of Oaxaca City. Spasmodic immigration had started first in Mexico City and spread to other large cities around the country. Incursions onto former agricultural land became common during the 1930s and increased from the 1970s onwards (Butterworth & Chance 1981: 40). The shortage of cheap housing, combined with large numbers of immigrants from the rural areas who had suffered from the crisis in the economy, encouraged these poor families to invade this land⁵⁷ (cf. Murphy & Stepick 1991). Oaxaca City was already crowded, making any further expansion difficult. The only areas available for agricultural use were in the hills surrounding the valley⁵⁸. The vast majority of immigrants to the colonia settled here around the mid seventies and early eighties, when new roads made access possible, though not easy (ibid.).

⁵⁷ This land was usually owned by the state. However, many of these settlements became regular when the local municipalities instigated infrastructure services and gave property titles to those settlers depending on their length of occupancy (Murphy & Stepick 1991: 66)

⁵⁸ Reyes Morales (1999) states that during this movement of immigrants into the city, household income was reduced, so more household members were forced to seek income elsewhere (Reyes Morales 1999: 13)

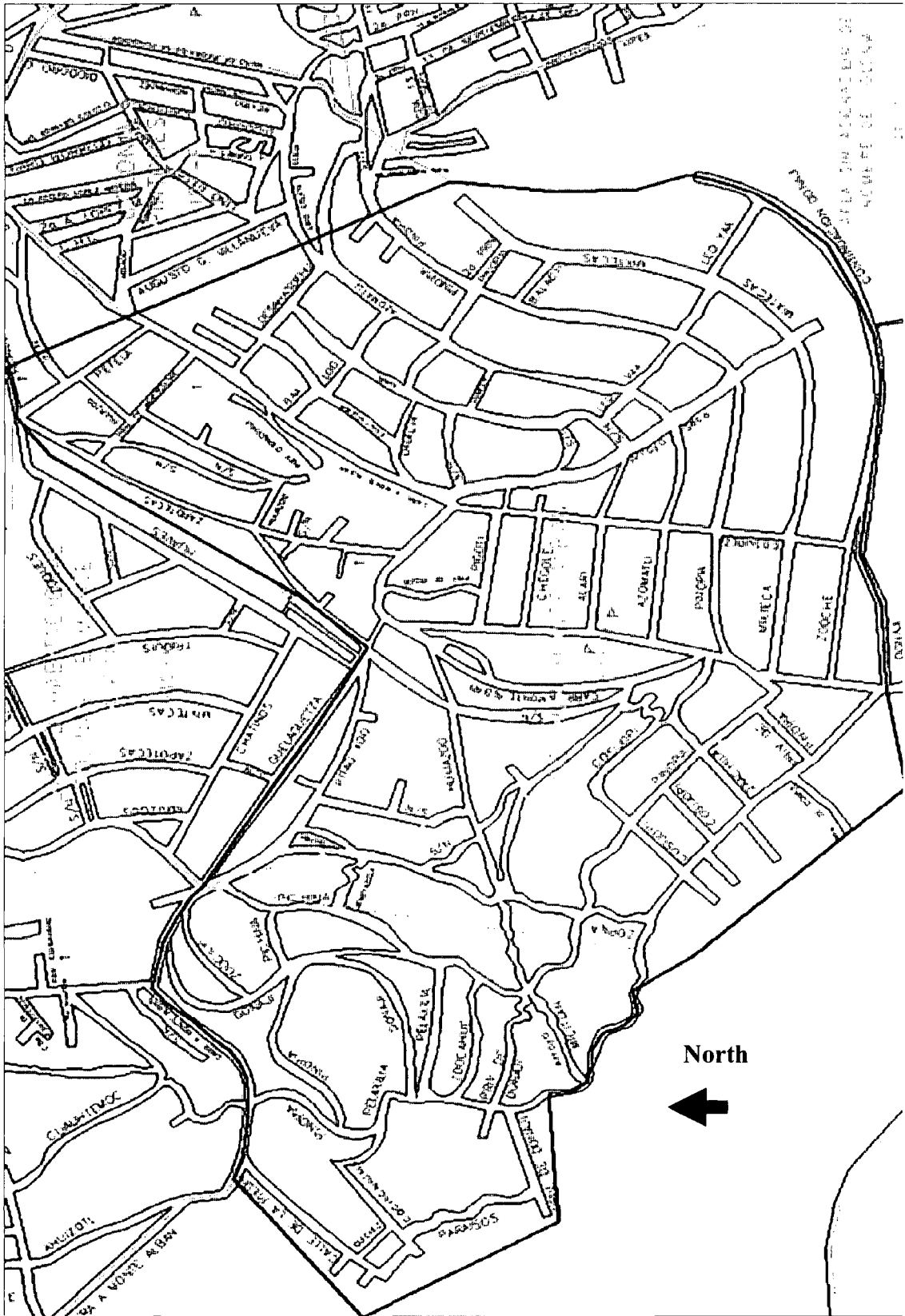


Figure 1. Colonia Monte Alban map. Source: INEGI SINCE CDROM, General Census of Mexican Population, Mexico, 2000. The red squares indicate approximately the location of the households in the sample.



Figure 2. View of colonia Monte Alban

According to the adults interviewed, men tended to migrate during the low agricultural seasons to Oaxaca de Juarez and Mexico City. This became a matter of urgency during the economic recession times in the early 1980s. In many cases, women were also able to migrate for longer periods than their male counterparts. This is supported by first hand information collected during fieldwork. At first, conditions in the colonia were very difficult, with the facilities being of poor quality or not provided at all, as the next excerpt shows:

When we first came to live here 30 years ago, there was nothing. No electricity or water, not even the buses to go to the city. We had to walk all the way down to San Martin to take the bus to the city. My father who used to walk all the way to the market at Benito Juarez to sell his fruits. Slowly we are having more services. Though, we still miss having sewage and water pipes. I feel so ashamed we don't have a proper toilet when guests or family come to visit from our villages. But I think we are much better now than in the beginning. That's what I tell my children, they should be grateful for what they have for without the efforts of my parents and mine, we would not even have this house (Maria, mother).

In the country, the illegal incursions onto agricultural and federal property have continued in the last decade. Some new *colonias populares*⁵⁹ have been established and gradually been equipped with infrastructure services. Even older ones like the

⁵⁹ *Colonias populares* have been settled on *ejido* land (communal lands), which until 1992 could not be sold to individuals. However, building a house on these lands acquires a different status. "Individuals are able to pass their homes down to their children or to sell the house to a third party if they have the approval of the village council or *ejido* commission. Thus, for village and villager alike, the existence of communal holdings is not impediment to the acquisition of land upon which to build a home. Urban housing on communal land is only one example of the irregular or squatter settlements [...]" (Murphy and Stepick 1991: 64).

colonia Monte Alban still attract new settlers into supposedly protected federal areas.⁶⁰ For in the last ten years in the northerner areas of Oaxaca City, more recent settlements continue receiving immigrants who live under the same conditions as in the *colonia* Monte Alban (Reyes Morales 1999).

The *Colonia* Monte Alban comprises about two percent of the population of Oaxaca City, and has about 3.5 percent of the area (*Gobierno del Edo. de Oaxaca* 2002). About 60 percent of the total population live in *colonias populares* (Murphy and Stepick 1991: 69). Although the majority of people are not regular plot owners, residents sell their plots all the time. There are a few organisations which appropriate illegally federal land and sell it for cheap prices hoping to avoid prosecution, e.g., the Governing Board headed by a non local teacher and a professional woman (SSA 2000). The prices of individual plots cost as much as £800 for a 5 by 10 square-meters.⁶¹

Typically, the *Colonia* Monte Alban would be classified as a *shanty town* because of its irregular characteristics, complete lack of infrastructure and other facilities such as drinking water, sewage, electricity and medical and school services. However, due to the development of infrastructure that has followed since its first settlers arrived, it became a *colonia popular*, as these settlements are better known in Mexico. In Mexico, this type of settlements is termed *colonia popular* because of its “unplanned” characteristics, the difficult terrain and its illegal status (Selby et al. 1990: 13-14). In the beginning, most of the “self-building” of the houses were of poor quality in both materials and planning. The owners, through the years, have been able to add and

⁶⁰ Plans to regularise the housing property are being pursued by the local organization of neighbours such as the Coordinating Committee for Agencies. They organise periodical assemblies with other settlements and the INAH to negotiate and legalise the irregular properties settled within federal land. Due to its federal status and national cultural heritage, invasions to Monte Alban land are considered a federal crime. Today, after years of invasions, only 10 percent of the original city has been recovered and restored (Society for American Archaeology 2003). The rest of the territory has been occupied and many pieces of old buildings and artefacts have been stolen since the time of the Colonial era. Many of the stolen material have been used to build new houses and buildings in the city, though the poor settlers have resorted to cheap material such as cardboard and paper (ibid.).

⁶¹ These peasants were not legal owners, just possessors according to the 27 article of the National Constitution, and thus they were forbidden to make any kind of commercial use of the land they cultivated (De Walt et al 1994). This article was modified in 1992 during president Salinas’ government, but the present settlers in Oaxaca were already living there, and in many cases owned the land by presidential decree.

build on extra rooms in a disorganised pattern. These houses were built to be functional rather than harmonious in their architectural style. Gradually, the settlers, as a result of organising themselves into political groups, have obtained some infrastructure services and property deeds from the government. These groups affiliated to three major Mexican political parties (PRI, PRD and PAN⁶²) lead the demands and negotiation for services in exchange for political votes during election times. Transport and communication services became available when the population increased and new routes for buses were established (Selby et al. 1990: 16).

The Colonia is not isolated. It constitutes a part of a larger group of settlements with similar socioeconomic and geographical characteristics. Its growth to the South is limited by *San Juan Chapultepec* or *San Juanito*. *San Juanito*, an original settlement dating from the Colonial period, which has an important catholic parish, which increases its popularity for the whole state. San Juanito church has a replica of the *Juquila* Virgin,⁶³ which is one of the main religious patrons in Oaxaca. It is also the church where most of the religious celebrations of the *colonia* dwellers take place. To the north of the colonia borders *San Martin Mexicapán*, the municipality district of the colonia. To the East of the area is located the *Fraccionamiento Colinas de Monte Alban* or *Monte Alban Hills* (from here on I will refer to it only as *fraccionamiento* to avoid any confusion), a working class settlement sponsored by the government during the 1970s and that today has a relationship of rivalry with the rest of the neighbouring *colonias*.

4.3 Socio-cultural and economic profile of migration

The origin of the settlers is as varied as the ethnic diversity of the state. They come from all over the seven regions that constitute Oaxaca State. The majority of the adult informants were from outlying rural areas, whereas the children were born mostly in the colonia. Initially, the strategy of the rural people was that they migrated to the cities and to large plantations in the north of Mexico and the United States, to find job

⁶² PRI, Partido de la Revolucion Institucional (Party of the Institutional Revolution); PRD, Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (Party of Democratic Revolution); PAN, Partido Accion Nacional (Party of Nacional Action).

⁶³ La Virgen de Juquila is originally worshipped in another church located by the Pacific Coast of Oaxaca state in a place of the same name, Juquila. Every year thousands of worshippers visit the virgin to celebrate the saint's day, and to request miracles and favours.

opportunities in non-specialised areas. When this failed, they were faced with the decision to move elsewhere. The immigration was done in stages for large households or kin groups (cf. Butterworht & Chance 1981: 51). First, the older sons and fathers moved and then the rest of the families would follow them (cf. Lewis 1969). As I observed with my informants, a great majority of men and women immigrants met their partners in the urban areas. The need for permanent housing was a major challenge. Facing a completely new social environment was the first obstacle to overcome. Heads of families were finding places and connections to settle in areas inhabited mostly by immigrants. Usually the husbands took on this task, though there are some cases of women on their own seeking for cheap land on which to build their houses. When the aim was to migrate to the United States, the wives and the children would at first be left behind in their communities, then later move to the cities or in rare cases they would migrate to the “other side” as the USA is better known to Mexicans. For many years, there were still a few women who have remained in the *colonia* receiving the remittances from their husbands in the USA (cf. Rees 1998: 1). These families tended to live much better than the rest of the *colonos*. The husbands visit at least once a year during Christmas or Easter, and if they have gained North American residence, they even take their families for holidays or to live with them. I met some women married to immigrant husbands or “wetbacks”⁶⁴ who were sceptical about the idea of moving abroad, as an informant in her mid-twenties once said: “I’m going to miss my parents and siblings and my neighbourhood if I ever move there where I wouldn’t understand the *gringos* [colloquial term for American people], speaking English...” (Silvana 24, woman).

Apparently, the reason for migration from rural to urban Oaxaca and places such as the *colonia* is based on economic necessity or as many of the informants said they “were looking to improve their families’ lives.” As reported in other studies (Lomnitz 1975; Gonzalez de la Rocha 1993), migration in Mexico is essentially the result of the impoverishment of the agrarian economy. As a consequence, a self-sufficient lifestyle of the peasant unit simply became stagnant due to cuts in the State subsidies and the financial drain the State suffers from trying to fund the industrialisation of the nation

⁶⁴ Colloquial term for illegal immigrants entering the United States. Its name takes after the way immigrants cross the border through the bordering river (Rio Bravo as named by Mexico, or Rio Grande know in the United States. People crossing the river literally submerge into the water, avoiding to be caught by the North American border patrol.

after the Second World War (De la Pena 1993). In individual terms, however, the reasons for migrating involve more complex and include differential elements than exclusively economic ones. Reasons such as family feuds, death of a parent and conjugal separation, are acknowledged by children as fundamental for this important decision. The children feel part of this decision for the very fact of being aware of it and supporting it. They do not always concur in regarding “poverty” as the main or only reason to migrate, as it was a “depersonalised” motive that just put them in along with the rest of the settlers. I believe that the main general cause of immigration for most people in the settlement is economic. However, families strive to differentiate themselves from the neighbours by exposing more “personal” motives and, therefore, to show a more “genuine” source for their presence in the urban landscape. Ruben (23), for instance, a man of the *triqui* ethnic group,⁶⁵ a young adult, who migrated with his mother and two younger brothers when he was seven, recalls the violent death of his father caused by a neighbour in their village. It is an event that has marked his entire life, and has “inspired” him to be a “better person and learn from his mother’s suffering” and his family’s deprived emotional and economic condition. According to his story, he found out that working as a wall painter was suitable for his needs, because it offered him some personal satisfaction, while he did not have to “report” to anyone. Self employment has been for the last 10 years his best opportunity, and is the best choice of many as demonstrated by the following account:

We wanted to have better lives, with schools for our children and better jobs for us, but it has not been very easy. You think that the city is like a paradise, but once you’re here, you have to know people to find a job. If you go on your own, they [employers] usually do not employ you or only pay you whatever they want... So, it is better to be your own boss (Raul, father).

Another good example of a non-economic reason for migrating is that of Cristina, 11. Cristina’s knowledge of her family’s migration out places her in a position that makes her part of the whole experience, even though she was not physically there. As a daughter of a family of five, an occasional domestic worker employed by neighbours

⁶⁵ The *Triqui* indigenous group originated in the western mountains of Oaxaca. In the last ten years, there has been a decline in the local population due to political instability, which generates violence and results in massive migration movements to Oaxaca City and other major cities. Most of the migrants are minors, but immediately engage in commercial activities (more than 30 percent of them are between 6 and 16 years old (Ortiz Nahon 1999: 67).

for less than a minimum wage, she is well aware, thanks to her mother's accounts, of the days when her parents moved to Oaxaca City from their coastal village in the south of the state:

My mother was married to a man she didn't like. She had my older brother and came to Oaxaca City alone [she separated from her husband]... The baby stayed with my grandparents because they didn't let her take him with her. My grandparents were annoyed with her and didn't talk to her for many years...Here she met my father in the same house where they were working... My mother was a maid and my father was the gardener. My mother now talks to my grandparents and my brother Felix came to stay with us for a while so he can find a job here (Carolina 11, girl).

Underlying the apparent non-economic reasons for migrating, there persists a strong economic element that exerts its influence in distinguishing the primary motives from those of a more personal relevance, such as those in the above testimonies. In children's understanding of their parent's decision to migrate, it seems that it is not only a matter of how poor their families were before moving to the colonia, but how this decision has impinged on their lives, and how it influences their own future. In this sense, the whole meaning of moving out from the rural village is not considered as a static event, but something that is vividly present in children's minds, appropriated and seen as an experience that would assist them in their current and future lives.

There are two main problems that immigrants face in their transition to the urban areas. The first difficulty is their traditional ethnic and rural background, which is not always possible to sustain in urban areas. The second problem refers to the poor urban salaries obtainable. In this situation, a man's income is insufficient to meet to the minimum demands of an urban lifestyle. So it is a great advantage if all members of the household are able to participate within the urban working environment. This involvement of the whole household is similar to what can be observed in small farms. According to Rees (1998), families resorted to make use of all the work force available (adult women and children) and to send men to find better job opportunities

in the United States.⁶⁶ This agrees with the testimonies of many of my informants. Large amounts of foreign remittances are sent home by the illegal immigrants that work in the United States. It was calculated for 1994 that 1.3 million immigrants were living in neighbouring northern country (Verduzco-Igartua 1995: 582). About 3.4 billion dollars are sent to their families in Mexico every year, of which 55 million dollars of these remittances are concentrated in the Oaxaca state alone (Lozano-Ascencio 1993). Therefore, a large proportion of the gross income produced in Oaxaca State is generated by immigration remittances (and tourism).

4.4 Living in the urban environment

4.4.1 Adults

Job access seems to be the most important element that encourages people to live and work in new places. For those immigrant families the major challenge is adapting to a new urban environment. After settling down in the shanty towns, getting jobs was a major concern. Adult men found it more difficult than adult women to obtain regular, long term employment. It was mainly the flexibility of the labour market and the limited skill level of the workers, which encouraged men to search for new occupational opportunities within the informal labour sector. Being of peasant origin reduced opportunities to all but very few non-skilled occupations. In the process of searching and actually finding an occupation, some of these adult men learned not only new labour skills, but gained knowledge of the local occupational fields and networks. Some of them acquired basic qualifications required by certain types of jobs, such as driving, plumbing and special aspects of building construction, which gave them independence and secured an income. This process has resulted in primary and secondary benefits in that their traditional sense of identity had been influenced by and adapted to the needs and claims of an urban environment (cf. Butterworth & Chance 1981: 92).

A very important result in combining old experience and learning new skills is the way this enables them to use their social networks to find a place in the competitive

⁶⁶ Four out of ten people migrate from their rural communities in order to find better job opportunities. From the 570 municipalities that constitute the Oaxacan State, 302 have either zero or negative growth rates. (Oaxaca State Profile 2000)

labour market. Adult women have found it easier to obtain jobs despite their limited skill profile. A great demand for domestic work in middle-class households opens job opportunities for women in a way that allows them to combine their work, with their own household's chores. However, lone women, separated, divorced, or left behind while the husbands were abroad, have found it more difficult to combine home and job duties. These women rely on children's work both around the house and paid work outside. Some of the lone women got married and now receive support from their partners, but most of them have continued in paid employment within the same domestic field. Younger ones have been able to acquire skills that suit their timetables and needs. Stitching, cooking, crafting for household items and parties are some of the activities they learned either from friends or in the adult workshops offered free by the municipality.

4.4.2 Children

Children for their part seem to be better equipped to survive and learn in this environment. Most children, actually over 95 % (source: *Science- Oaxaca* 2000), have been born in the municipality, and most still have contact with their parents or grandparents' villages, but they do not identify closely with them. The distance that separates them from their parents' original communities is reflected in the way they express their sense of belonging. Children are denied the opportunity of going back to their parent's villages: they could not "feel themselves in there" (sic), as most children expressed it: they mentioned, for instance, how difficult they would find it to work in the fields, or having to get up very early. The majority of children interviewed expressed their contentment with living in their present neighbourhood. This contrasts with the ideals of a better place to live, children themselves mentioned in some interviews.⁶⁷ They wished, for instance, to live in a "house of brick and cement with many rooms and a proper toilet." In particular situations, they also showed that they

⁶⁷ In a group session, children were asked about the differences of living in the rural as opposed to urban areas. Children, in referring to their school text books, mentioned that the rural villages and the countryside as an "ideal" place to live. While urban areas were associated with pollution problems and crowds. When confronted with the idea of labour access and types of activities in those two settings, children seemed to have a different opinion, boys, more than girls, chose urban employment over rural in a future perspective (when they become adults). Girls were contented with either choice, though the idea of getting up earlier than men and boys did not appeal to them. In present terms, boys and girls associated countryside and rural villages as places to visit for short holidays, and they did not mind having to work alongside their relatives for few days.

were ashamed of their houses' conditions in the occasions when having guests such as me: "Laurita, I'm very sorry we don't have a proper seat for you..." These children want their houses to be as "pretty" as the houses in the middle class neighbourhood of the colonia *Reforma*, in the northern area of the city: "The Reforma is very posh, and has lovely houses..." as Felipe, a thirteen-year old boy, expressed one day when we were discussing about his one-room house.

Children and young people still dream of migrating to the United States. The possibility of returning to their parents taking their families back to their villages seemed rather odd to some children interviewed. These children did not find any kind of relationship between them and their parents' villages of origin. Holidays and festivities were the images associated with the villages. To initiate a life in the countryside as peasants is out of question for most of them, as Jaime an eleven year old boy once said:

I like to go to Candelaria to visit my grandparents, uncles, aunties and everyone else, to play with my cousins and go to bathe in the river, but my mother is always asking me to go and learn to work in the fields. I don't want to go there. I like it here. I would be very bored without my friends and without the money I can get working in the city... (Jaime 11, boy).

Returning to the village seems more like the last option as their economic situation does not improve. Although some other children identify with their parent's villages, it is seen more as a matter of leisure, than of a practical way to improve their life standards.

4.5 Living material conditions

Unplanned growth, lack of services and limited budget for the improvement of housing quality, makes the urban landscape, to look abandoned and poor. However, an order prevails which the local residents strive to give to the place. There is the individual household "self-building" investment scheme that has taken years to prove successful. Their houses are being built from scratch to form one-room homes. More recently improvements have been made, including kitchens; one or two separate bedrooms, and, for the more fortunate ones, even a shower.

4.5.1 Housing

As it was reported during my interviews with the poor dwellers, the value of the houses in the colonia is not related exclusively to their material construction. Instead, the *colonos* regard the land as the benchmark of their property and what is more important, of their sense of belonging. They expressed sentiments like "...we don't mind if we are living in a cardboard house as long as we have a roof above us", telling me that worse would be to live by begging and sleeping on the streets as they have seen families do it in the city. Though it has been a legal fight to obtain property titles, it also has been hard for them to allocate themselves in a crowded place "where everybody knows everybody else's business".

4.5.1.1 Low income households

The shady appearance of the makeshift dwellings is an indication of economic depravation. The poverty of some households is related to the inhabitants' duration of residence in Monte Alban and their low income. The latest arrivals have not been able to improve their house constructions. There are still properties made of metal, cardboard and wood (shack or *jacalito*). These are inhabited by some of the poorest households, whose income consists of one and two minimum salaries per week obtained by using all the available work force. In 1999, the minimum salary in Oaxaca was of 29.70 pesos per day (£1.98 p/d) which increased to 32.70 pesos per day (£2.18 p/d) for the year 2000 (INEGI 2000), reflecting the same amounts reported in my interviews. The income has to cover basic expenses such as food, bills (gas and electricity, if available), transport and school materials. Generally, it is considered that the major income is generated by the father. Due to the irregularity of job demand, fathers are not always guaranteed a stable income for their households. De facto, mothers and older children contribute to a higher household income by performing all sorts of works. Altogether, these households may obtain the equivalent of three minimum salaries, but on an irregular basis. Often, it is the mother who receives the income and redistributes it for daily expenses to the household members. The husband or partner receives enough money for transport. He takes his own lunch to avoid paying for food. The children receive some pocket money for school lunch, others take egg and beans sandwiches. The rest of the money is spent by the housewife to

pay for food and other expenses. Mothers include in their daily routine to make trips to the close-by market to buy fresh groceries.

4.5.1.2 Room distribution

The interior organisation of the houses is similar in every home. The pattern includes a main room that accommodates all the members of the households (up to eight members in a single room). The main room may have only one window if any, which makes it appear more cramped. The houses all have mud floors. Doors are made of metal or cardboard and, usually, secured with a block or a wooden stick to close the entrance. Security is not a prime matter of concern for the residents.

There are several separate areas within one single room. It is divided up by the allocation of furniture. A hanging curtain divides the kitchen from the bedroom area. In the bedroom a couple of beds lay next to each other. Usually one is double and the other single. It is common for parents to share their own bed with one or two of their young children, while the eldest son or daughter may share the second bed with the rest of the siblings, and sometimes there is even one child sleeping on a *petate* (straw mat) in the kitchen. When children become teenagers, parents try to separate them by buying a third bed, or if the income is available, even buy a cheap bunk bed. Clothes are kept in cardboard boxes and in the mother's bridal chest with some other valuable possessions such as birth certificates, family documents and photographs. The mother's wooden chest is one of the most important personal possessions she received as a bridal present from her husband's family. A second-hand TV set and radio may be found in the sleeping area. Bare posters of saints and pop singers, along with family portraits hang on the walls. An altar is always present in the house, usually in the bedroom. Although the altar occupies a prominent place in the rural house, in the urban areas it occupies a less important place that has only been preserved by tradition rather than strong religious belief.



Figure 3. Houses in Pinopia Street

The kitchen is equipped with basic cookery utensils and furniture: a second hand gas cooker, one or two old metal cupboards, a small dining table, two or three chairs, pans and pots, and plastic tableware and some cheap cutlery. Fridges and other electrical appliances do not exist, with the exception of the liquidiser. Families keep fresh food on the patio, protected in a secure place, out of the reach of dogs and cats. The dishes are washed in the laundry basin, located in the patio. Also in the patio, it is possible to find a rudimentary stove feed by firewood, when gas cannot be purchased.

The toilet and shower are usually placed at the rear of the house, and are made of wood with plastic curtains, but without roofs or windows. This is thought to be a temporary situation. Residents expect to improve their economic condition and the installation of proper sewage at some later date. Their expectations might not seem very realistic, but in similar urban settlements around the country, significant improvement has been observed (Reyes Morales 1999; Ramirez Saiz 2005).

The patio, as well as a place for work, is used for relaxation and to socialise with the neighbours. The patio is one of the most important areas during the hot season. In this kind of house during the spring, the hottest season between April and June when the temperature rises to between 28 to 37 °C, it is almost impossible to stay indoors because the metal roofs and walls become so hot that families have to carry out most of their activities outdoors.

4.5.2 Electricity

The first electric installations were initiated 25 years ago. Formerly the poorest families used to steal it by illegally connecting to the public electricity pylons. Gradually, these poor families started obtaining electricity, and signing contracts with the Federal Electricity Company (CFE, *Compañía Federal de Electricidad*). Now, electricity is available for everyone who can afford to pay for the installation of the electric pole and the meter at the entrance to their house. Some families find it easier and cheaper to obtain light by using candles or kerosene lamps, which have been proven to be dangerous for their users (I learned of a house that burned down during my first days of fieldwork, because someone forgot to extinguish a light candle when leaving home; fortunately no one was at the house when the accident occurred).

4.5.3 Water supply

A drinking water service is another of the essential needs which still presents serious problems for the dwellers. Oaxaca has a rainy season of three months, when water pours all over the valleys. However, drinking water is as hard to obtain as during the dry season, because the clean water is contaminated by dirty water due to the lack of the maintenance of the pipes system (Murphy & Stepick 1991, 50). Water supply varies during the day. It does not run continuously. It is provided only for a few hours every afternoon, and there are even few days when it never appears, so people have to store it in large metal tanks in their patios.⁶⁸ The water is of unsatisfactory quality. Even though it has chlorine in the distribution centre, during its transportation it may become contaminated. Constantly, people are encouraged to boil it for drinking purposes. The rest of the water is stored for washing and for personal use. There are no boilers to warm water for hot showers. People are used to taking showers in cold water. As a consequence of the scarcity of this precious liquid, people tend to have showers less frequently than their city centre counterparts. Drinking water is provided by one of the community tanks allocated on the base of the ravine. Otherwise, the few people who have a standpipe allow these families to get water for a fee or free. The source of this water runs from the other side of the hill. It is located in the southeast,

⁶⁸ As Murphy & Stepick indicate, the water system was planned for a city of 25 thousand people in the 1930s. It is defective and has a poor service. Besides, Oaxaca city is located in one of the driest areas of the state; a factor that constitutes a great problem in supplying regular clean water to all its inhabitants (1991: 50).

close to *Xoxocotlán* municipality where the valley is more uniform and so is able to retain rain water.

4.5.4 Telephone service

Finally, in the list of services the telephone is considered a luxury rather than a basic need. The telephone is a very limited service that only the families with long term residence and better incomes can afford. Only about 10 families in the whole area have this service. These few families “lend”, but more precisely sell, the service to neighbours by charging some pesos for local calls. Only two of my informants feel “privileged” to have it. Telephone is not still a widespread need. It is considered an “emergency” service to call the doctor or to receive call from long distances, from the United States or the village. Those people, who have no access to their neighbours’ telephones, are able to pay for cheap calls in the cabins located in the *fraccionamiento*, or in the many small communication shops distributed in the *central de abastos* and the city centre.

4.6 Civil, political and informal organisation groups

4.6.1 The demands and achievements of *colonos*

The Colonia Monte Alban is a municipal agency of the major municipality of San Martin Mexicapan, located northwest of the Colonia. Their political organisation follows the same pattern as the entire state. It is governed locally by a municipal president who is elected by the local residents. The President is followed in the hierarchy by the General Secretary, the Leader of the Justice or Syndic (judge) and the Treasure Secretary. As is observed in other areas of Oaxaca, this practice has allowed certain autonomy to the Oaxacan communities to elect and follow their political activities, according to the need expressed directly by the citizens.⁶⁹ By tradition, the members of the municipality or *cabildo* do not receive any kind of salary for their service. It is a community service by the men in peasant areas who are obliged to undertake it at least once in their lifetime. In contrast to the rural areas, the urban

⁶⁹ Oaxaca is the only Mexican State that follows an autonomous indigenous political organisation that allows the citizens to elect a local leader and other representatives based in the “cargo system” (cabinet selection). The term “cargo” literally means to “be in charge of...” official responsibility.

areas are under the influence of the major political parties. This political structure has suffered changes in the way the leaders participate in and work for their community's improvement. They receive personal "gratuities" or gifts from the parties for encouraging their people to select a particular party. They are promised, and at the same time promise, their voters' benefits in the short and long run, i.e., schools, paved roads, sewage, etc. According to some adult informants, the majority of them are corrupted during their career, and rarely obtain the results promised and so leave their positions with bad reputations. Few are recalled to have been positive and conscious of the needs of the communities under their leadership.

4.6.2 Rivalry between settlements

The colonia Monte Alban, along with other *colonias populares* around, have sustained a long term rivalry with the established settlement with which they share boundaries. The *fraccionamiento* (estate) Colinas de Monte Alban is apparently seen as a constant source of physical and economical differentiation to the settlers of the *fraccionamiento*. For the dwellers of the colonia Monte Alban, the inhabitants of the *fraccionamiento* are seen as more "privileged" residents, who enjoy good services, infrastructure, and better housing conditions and stable jobs. However, as I came to realise during the months of fieldwork, that there are status differences based on house ownership, more than in income sources of the inhabitants of the *fraccionamiento*. While Monte Alban *colonos* have been stigmatised by their mere existence within illegal land parameters, the *fraccionamiento* residents were subsidised and helped by the existing housing schemes. The first group, the colonia dwellers, feel neglected, the second, the *fraccionamiento*, stigmatised and threatened by the poverty of former. The two settlements have relatives and ritual kinship links in both areas. Many of the main sources of income are found in the informal sector, though there is a tendency for the *fraccionamiento* dwellers to have better jobs and incomes, mainly in the city bureaucracy.

Something that attracted my attention when interviewing people from both settlements, was that some families from both sides of the rural/urban divide are related and maintain strong links when it comes to ceremonial occasions. *Colonos* have established ritual links with their own kin in order to extend their relationships

within the *fraccionamiento* and obtain some benefits from them. This offers them not only the opportunity to fulfil their ritual duties, but also to obtain opportunities for jobs, loans, and presents for the children. Many women and men of the colonia work with families in the *fraccionamiento* by performing a variety of tasks, from cooking to house building. Men are hired as brick-layers, labourers, painters, plumbers, taxi drivers, among other activities; while women usually perform domestic jobs such as the laundry and house cleaning for their “*comadres*”⁷⁰ or the friends of them. Children expect to carry out activities for their “*padrinos*” and “*madrinas*” (godfather and godmother); in order to receive small presents such as second hand clothes and toys, sweets and pocket money. Finding ritual kinship in the colonia by the *fraccionamiento* people hardly occurs. They look elsewhere for what they consider to be people of similar social status, by either finding them in the same settlement or within their job situations.

4.6.3 Youth informal groups

As mentioned above, local groups or groups of youths are part of the daily social landscape of the colonia. Some of them are well known by the locals to be disruptive and so most people prefer to avoid them. They are regarded as people “without anything better to do” (Doña Concha, grandmother), and lacking education or job experience. Opinion is divided, as people such as Dolores (21 years old, woman) believe that “they are just lazy and having a gang life makes it easy to get things by robbing or threatening people”. Others, such as Ruth, an NGO worker, thought that the problem was related to “education being a privilege of the better off families”, whereas these youths lack the necessary attributes for employment”.

The teenagers in my sample know who gang members are. Some of these *gangs* were formed after one of their members returned from the United States, bringing new fashionable ideas of gang behaviour. Some of the old gangs are dedicated to illegal activities like thieving, robbery and selling illegal drugs. Others simply get together to play with their scooters, to chat and to idle around during the afternoons. Their language code relates to their group identity. They greeted each other in English slang

⁷⁰ The mother of the godchild and the godmother refer to each other as *comadres*.

by saying “How are you man?” This was believed by Luis and the other teenagers to be a sign of belongingness and superiority to their rival gangs and other non-gang teenagers. They dress also in fashion wearing large hipster trousers, long-patterned shirts and chains. Their look relates to the black and Mexican-North American gangs, known as *cholos*.⁷¹ These youngsters are very criticised by their non-gang peers as being non-original. Some of them have never been away to the United States, but wish to have done so. English names are their mark of identity. They do not speak English, but copy phrases from movies and songs.

Drugs are of concern to the families in Monte Alban; not a primary one, but rather an “annoying one”, because drug use marks a certain stigma in the neighbourhood. None of the children in my sample were on drugs; despite that two of them were friends with some of the gang members known as the “Zeros” (number zero). More than once the smell of burning marijuana pervaded the atmosphere in *Donaji* Street, more than once I encountered a mature drug addict roaming on the streets of the colonia. I did not interview children belonging to these groups, because of the legal and ethical implications, and, mainly because it was seen by the people I worked with as suspicious and risky.

4.7 Routine

4.7.1 Morning

A typical day in the colonia starts at around six o'clock in the morning, soon after the roosters' call. Women wake up first to prepare the meagre breakfast. Different radios play the same music around the neighbourhood where other women start the day as well. All the family sleep in the same clothes they were wearing the day before. As the water is almost freezing in the morning, all the family members only groom. The showers are left for the afternoons, when the water in the tanks has been warmed naturally by the sun.

⁷¹In the United States and Mexico, *cholos* are known as gangs of young men with dressing codes and own vocabulary. There is a tendency to suggest that *cholos* are criminals and drug users whose memberships is result of their failure to find jobs in the local labour markets either in the States or Mexico (Cebada Contreras 1997).

4.7.1.1 Children's activities in a typical day

Around seven a.m. the rest of the family, including the children who have to go to the morning school shift, queue to wash their faces and have a bite of bread or tortillas, while the eldest son or daughter prepares the school lunch. If there are pre-school children in the family, the mother usually stays and prepares them a more substantial breakfast consisting of some milk and eggs. Children start the school morning shift at 8 o'clock in the morning.⁷² Preschool children attend from 9 to 12 in the morning. Although elementary and secondary education is compulsory, some of the older children do not go to school, going instead for strolls around the neighbourhood. The most adventurous elementary school children go to other *colonias* or to visit their friends in the neighbouring secondary or *vice versa*. There are no barriers or walls that limit the secondary school, so children go in and out when security is not available. Truanting children usually go to *San Martin* to wander around or play video games (*maquinistas*) in corner shops with the few pesos for their lunch or from borrowed money from the owner of the shop. This money is later paid by running errands or sweeping the floors. These truancy escapades (*irse de pinta*) are very common among children who usually are behind the rest of the class, in terms of knowledge. One of my informants, for instance, a girl by the name of Alicia aged 14, was having problems keeping up with her class. One day her mother found out she was skipping classes to play with other class mates outside the school. She was caught by the school social worker, as she relates:

I didn't tell anything to my mother that day... She found out the next week when she read my notebook and found the social worker's notice requesting her presence at school...I did not tell her because I knew she was going to be furious at me and would punish me. I received the punishment anyway... A friend of Maricarmen [a classmate], an old woman, who lived close to her place came instead of my mother. We paid her some money so she would pretend and sign the behavioural report instead of my mother.... Ay God!! I

⁷² In Mexico elementary and secondary schools is organised in two day shifts. The morning shift, from 8 am to 12.30 pm. The afternoon shift is from 2 to 6.30 pm. Children attend only one of the shifts throughout the school year. Children working in the streets as sellers usually attend the afternoon shift, in order to dedicate their mornings to work.

cried and cried until I was tired that night because my mother hit me very hard and told me very bad things I don't want to hear again... (Alicia 14, girl).

Alicia did skip classes on other occasions along with her group of four girl friends. She soon forgot her punishment and it became a challenge to hide from her mother and the school authorities. It is part of the daily urban landscape to see children, in uniforms or in ordinary clothes playing, around the streets of the other neighbourhoods. When the time to come back home arrives, these children simply pop in at the entrance of the school and pretend to leave it, as if having been there all day.



Figure 4. Coming back from school. Photo taken by Luis.

4.7.1.2 Adult women activities

At quarter to nine, *Donaji* Street and the side roads and paths swarm with mothers and crying children running to avoid being left outside the kindergarten. For them there is no punishment if their children do not attend school, but the shame women receive from other women can be hard to bear. They are criticised and gossip soon circulates referring to them as *fodongas* (lazy) mothers who wake up late and do not take good care of the children. Gossip is the “*bread of everyday life*” as Dolores, a young woman, accounts for the women that come to visit her mother. Some people take it as

part of daily life, while others like Dolores just bear it and contribute to its spreading, “[Everybody] in a way, needs to gossip, so everybody is happy”. She once told me about how she believed gossip was there before her and even before anyone else she knew. Her conclusion was that there cannot be any control over gossip: “you just have to be careful of what you get involved in when people gossip”.

The women outside the schools stay for a little gossip and a little chat to relax. They exchange worries and concern about the next hour, meals, the laundry and the visit to the clinic. However, the main concern and a general one is the limitation of their income. These women always end by sharing their same feeling of “misery”, as some of them expressed, which last for a few minutes until someone else asks about any other subject of the previous day such as the weather: “How was the rain yesterday! “Very strong...Did you see the new house falling apart with the mud? Very lucky they were not at home...” (Chela, mother).

After a while these mothers disperse and go back home to continue their daily tasks. Some women start doing the laundry, some other go to the market, and another will go to visit their neighbour. More than once I witnessed two or three women going, individually, to Dolores’s house to ask for small loans. Dolores’s mother, Doña Maria, is the only woman in the sample with a stable job. Her job, as a cleaner in the major telecommunication office in the region, pays one of the better salaries in its category (three minimum salaries)⁷³. Therefore, the neighbours know she has a permanent salary. Doña Maria lends money now and then, but many times she complained, “it was not fair to lend money and later almost beg for it back”:

I understand they have no stable jobs and deep inside them I know they envy me because I have one. But I had to work hard to get what I have achieved. I had to wait a long time to save enough money to build this house. But they just want easy money. I don’t mind lending money as long as they pay everything back” (Doña Maria, mother).

Mothers who have no stable jobs, like Chela, a mother of four children, obtain cash by working as a domestic. Chela works as cleaner in the kindergarten two days a week

⁷³ In 1999, the minimum salary in Oaxaca was of 29.70 pesos per day (£1.98 p/d) which increased to 32.70 pesos per day (£2.18 p/d) for the year 2000 (INEGI 2000).

and receives about 300 pesos per month. But when her services are not required, she works as a cook with two families in the *fraccionamiento*. Other informal jobs for women comprise laundering, ironing, house cleaning, preparing tortillas, food, looking after older people and baby sitting (by girls and adult women). Most of these mothers have reached a period where they rely on older children to take on paid jobs in or outside their homes. Women prefer to work during the hours children are at school; mainly in the mornings. Sometimes the mothers' work extends to the afternoons and the children come back to cook for themselves and look after the younger ones.

4.7.1.3 Men's activities

Although men are not regularly employed, they tend to be absent from their homes during the day, with some exceptional cases. Men who work, leave their homes between seven and eight o'clock. Even when not employed, men visit various places around the city seeking employment during a few hours. Later they go to the bars and spend the few pesos, saved by their wives. Usually they return drunk to their homes and spend next the day at home recovering from the hangover and being looked after by their own children.

Those men, fathers who remain at home, usually take care of their children when their partners are at work. Fathers such as Leonardo and Mario are able cooks, so, when there are children back from school usually find ready food for their dinners. These fathers have managed to combine jobs in a non-regular timetable with looking after their children, whereas the mothers act as main providers. In a third case, Ramiro, a father of four, has remained at home for the last 10 years due to his acute diabetes. In contrast to the other two fathers, Ramiro spends most of his time repairing his house, when his health condition allows him. Ramiro is not involved in domestic matters, and expects his two daughters to return from work to cook and clean.

4.7.2. Family gatherings

At the time when children finish school around one o'clock, they come back home hungry and "tired" as they always expressed it, from school activities. Uniforms are

not very well cared for. Most of the children stay in school uniforms and wash them at the weekend. Older sisters usually are in charge of washing them. Only the boys who have much older sisters, or no female siblings at all, do some personal laundry. Others adhere to more “masculine” stereotypes perceive the activity as purely feminine and leave it to their mothers.

Children have lunch around two o’clock. Meals are not very elaborate nor are always a harmonious event. All of the family members are not always present. The father and mother might be at work and some of the children late from school, especially the teenagers who go to secondary school and finish an hour and a half later than the primary children. Arguments about daily events may arise during meals. If one of the parents or older sibling is present he or she has the duty to pacify these outbursts. Sometimes, an angry sibling might skip the meal out of discontentment and as a protest. Sometimes, it is the mother who ejects him or her from the kitchen as a punishment. However, at the end, when everybody else has finished, the child is allowed to come back and finish his or her meal.

The afternoons are dedicated to completing domestic tasks for the family members present: girls to clean and wash along with their mothers, boys to run errands like going to buy eggs and milk for their father’s dinner. Afterwards, children play on the patio, go to watch someone else’s TV, or simply “do nothing” (James 1983). The children that work in the afternoons or all day come back between seven and eight. They have dinner with the father and later everyone goes to bed. When the night falls and everybody is in bed, only the dogs bark now and then. Drunken men sing or argue between them, and so life continues until the next day.

4.7.3 Weekends

Saturdays and Sundays can be very intense in terms of working for all household members. Commonly, fathers also work on Saturdays but come back home earlier. The rest of the day is dedicated to continuing to build on an extra room, to weed or to visit friends. Mothers like Chela (29 years) have one of the most productive days working at the *tianguis* (mobile market) selling second hand goods. It is on Saturdays when her second hand clothes and toys sell the best in the *tianguis Central de*

Abastos. She usually takes all her children with her to stay from 7 till 3 in a small area of the floor where her merchandise is exposed to customers. The children stay by her side most of the time, bored or playful. Alicia, the eldest, cares for her siblings: buying food for them, feeding and playing with them. Alicia also takes them back home while her mother stays on trying to sell the goods and to do some grocery shopping.

Children attend leisure and religious activities organised by the NGOs working in the area and the Catholic chapel. Children at the age for Christian communion attend the catechism classes on Sundays. In particular, girls look forward to the classes led by nuns or other parish locals. They love to sing religious songs and recite the communion commandments, while boys expressed their boredom by being “naughty” and “unsettled” as the girls complained. In the afternoons children are invited to visit friends to watch TV or to play on the streets. Possession of toys is rare, and the ones they have are second hand and not cared for very well. Nude dolls without arms or hair are the toys for solitary children who play role games imitating their parents. For girls playing to be mothers is a serious matter. They feed, care and punish their dolls or small siblings. Boys are less keen to play with their sisters, but when they do, they follow the same pattern of mimicking male adults by pretending to work away from home and bringing money. Cars made of wood are the favourites of the young boys. Old balls, wooden yoyos and carts made by the children are the favourite ones; though they always expressed their desire to one day have brand new toys like the ones they have seen on TV.

During spring, families take hiking trips to la *cañada* (reed bed) in the other side of the hill. It is the favourite place for youngster to collect custard apples, wild berries, grasshoppers and oranges. Also, during the days surrounding All Saints Days, in the first days of November, women and children collect wild flowers for the altars made for the dead. They sell these flowers or keep them for their own celebration. It is rare to find people from the colonia visiting the city centre. They prefer to go to visit neighbours or relatives in close by areas. Going to the city means spending money for transport and snacks and sweets for the children. Instead, Monte Alban residents take advantage of these festivities by working at selling snacks and sweets to the tourists.

4.7.4 Non-routine activities: ritual life

4.7.4.1 Sunday mass

Some of the women and young children may attend Sunday mass in the local chapel, but most of them prefer to walk to San Juanito and hear mass there from the foreign priests. Occasional visits to San Juanito church give them the advantage to see family and friends, to fix up old disputes and to chat of other people. It is also in San Juanito parish where children of the colonia are christened, take communion and school graduation masses take place (celebrated at the end of every school year).

4.7.4.2 Graduation ceremonies

In June the colonia residents celebrate events such as school graduations as major community events. Children from pre-school to secondary school have graduation congregations. Graduations are celebrated independently and, usually, organised by the mothers of the pupils. All children receive presents from their godparents. Maldonado Alvarado (1999: 43), states that the organisation and celebration of these ceremonies sometimes fall within “the absurd” (ibid.). Huge expenses have to be met by the families. These religious-secular rites play an important role in maintaining the community coherence by relating to people whom they believe are of better status.

Children as young as five dress up in formal suits and party gowns. A mass is celebrated and later on a dance festival and a meal are offered. Children of all ages learn to appreciate these ceremonies. They expect their godparents to gift them large floral bouquets, for both girls and boys, and presents such as clothes, toys and school materials.

According to Maldonado Alvarado (1999), the organisation of these secular festivities is part of the cultural identity the immigrants want to adapt to an urban environment where their children now are being brought up. Part of the purpose of these ceremonies, according to Maldonado Alvarado, is to extend the household social networks of rural immigrants who find it hard to adapt to an urban environment, where people act more as individuals than in the rural communities (Alvarado 1999:

43-45). During my fieldwork, I witnessed the celebration of the teenagers graduating from high-school. They showed and expressed the importance of this day marking it as a rite of passage, where their “childhood was being left behind” in a formal way. They believe however, that in their “hearts they always will be children”. Godparents might be the same people that attended their christening. If they are not available, as often occurs, the mothers are always keen to find replacement godparents among neighbours, people from the *fraccionamiento*, teachers and even single persons.⁷⁴ Some times the links of ritual kinship prevail after the ceremonies and adults establish long term relationships, which entail economic opportunities, status and reorganisation among a broad group of urban settlers. On other occasions, these last only few months and relapse if one of the parties, usually the godparents loses interest. The parents are always keen to find new godparents in every occasion. Young children were sympathetic and respectful, as they expect nice presents from their *padrinos* (godparents). Instead, the parents are the ones who constantly insist in teaching to their children to learn to respect adults, to love them and to please their ritual kin. Children recognise this relationship but are more relaxed towards the rigid views of adults in terms of respect (cf. Alvarado Maldonado 1999, 46). They are encouraged to please and receive, in exchange, presents and pocket money. In many observed cases, the *padrinos* or godparents are important sources of income as they may offer their godchildren domestic work or jobs in the city. The work-dealings, in most of the cases, are negotiated by the adults as in only a couple of cases the children were asked for their opinion, though at the end it was not taken into account. Therefore, parents conceive their ritual kinship as a means not only to spread their social networks, but also to obtain economic benefits for their children and their household by committing helping their sons and daughters to find work in the future to support the household.

4.7.4.3. Fifteenth birthdays

Another important festivity which Oaxaca immigrants are adopting is the Coming of Age, i.e., the 15th birthday only for girls (boys do not have an equivalent ceremony, at

⁷⁴ According to the Catholic dogma, godparents have to be a Catholic married couple, joined in a Catholic wedding. Nowadays, although the dogma is the same, the practice shows to be different. Single persons are accepted, and depending of the priest, they may not search for the Catholic membership of the candidates act as godparents. So, many young people who work, are becoming godparents to children.

least not among the colonia dwellers). While in the countryside, birthdays are never celebrated and hardly remembered, in the cities it has been a custom for the last fifty years. After being a celebration for the upper and middle urban class, gradually it has become an urban lower class celebration (Lewis 1964). Girls always look forward to this day and make plans, along with their parents of the details for the party: the dress, the music, the food to be served, the guests, and most important, how many godparents she will have. The number of godparents chosen relates to what the low budget families are able to spend for this occasion (Maldonado Alvarado 1999). The strategy for lower class families, all over the country, has been to find as many godparents as possible to pay for the expenses, from buying the gown, to paying for the alcoholic drinks and others to even buy the underwear. This relatively new custom saves money and effort to the parents of the *quinceañera* or the 15th birthday girl. The celebration starts when the girl and her guests attend a celebration mass. The priest reads some bible passages related to this day and gives some advice on the correct behaviour a *señorita*, a young lady, should follow. Later, everybody reunites in the house of the hosts or the hired ballroom. They have a meal, dance and comment on the ceremony, the girl's outfit and so on. In this day, the celebrated girl is treated as a "princess" and some new customs are incorporated into the festivity, i.e., a moment for "crowning" the girl and showing to the guests that the girl is not only ready to behave as an adult, but as exceptional and respectful. Other activities performed during this celebration includes to receive a "last toy", as sign of leaving childhood behind; to dance a waltz with the father and other men relatives; to perform a modern dance with the young men companions; to blow out the candles and cut the cake. The whole idea resembles a wedding celebration, without the groom, I have only witnessed this celebration in Mexico.

The 15th birthday celebration is considered a rite of passage for women who leave behind childhood and are considered by society now as women. In the past society celebrated that the girls were considered ready for marriage. Today, girls of all social classes are expected to marry after they obtain a college degree in universities or technical school. Actually, many girls under and over 15 are still getting married⁷⁵, or pregnant, with or without their parents' consent. Parents claim that no matter how

⁷⁵ Age of consent is from the age of 18. Younger people may marry with parental signed permission only.

expensive the celebration can be, they are always very keen to save and ask for financial help from friends and relatives. Girls feel committed to behave as well as possible when the time for celebration approaches. They promise themselves to keep single until the right time comes, as a way to thank their parents. As I stated before, marriage around this time is not strange for many girls, particularly among lower class girls. Rosalia (15) got married a year after her 15th birthday. She was doing a technical degree in computing. She abandoned school because according to her, she did not have time, money and permission from her husband to work or study. In the beginning, her parents did not approve of her being married, but later they contributed to some of the expenses for a modest wedding, which she had while being 5 months pregnant. She and her husband moved to live in the same crowded house of her parents, while waiting for her husband to get a better job and rent a place in the neighbourhood.

Other similar cases appear to be a regular occurrence among young women. They have a 15th birthday celebration and appear to have great expectations for a future professional life, but secretly, they claim, had a relationship with a boyfriend “they are in love with”. Parents on their side, in all my interviews, claimed their right to forbid girls, but not boys, having courtship relationships. Though it is an extended custom, both, parents and children endeavour to fit according to their expected roles. Girls have boyfriends among school classmates and try to spend as much time as possible with them. According to their parents, this is a bad habit that results in a bad reputation for the girls, “I don’t want my daughter to be the centre of gossip around here” Rosalia’s mother claimed many times during my interviews. She was concerned that her daughter would be able “to take them out of their poverty”. Rosalia (15 years) had one boyfriend when I did my fieldwork, but it was a secret from her mother, but not to her friends and some neighbours. When her mother found out, Rosalia received a physical punishment that kept her with her “shame” indoors for a few days.

4.7.4.4 All Saints’ Day

Secular and religious festivities are celebrated all the year round. All Saints’ day in November is a particularly important celebration by the community. It is a feast where secular and religious beliefs combine to offer the opportunity for people to remember

their dead relatives. Children are happy to participate in the preparation of the altars at school and at home. They bring fruit, sweets and coloured paper to decorate the school altar. It is around this time that children and adult women collect wild flowers to embellish the altars. They sell them in the markets and keep some for their own decorations. So, the celebration entails a series of preparations that start a few days before and end the second day of November, when all the household members enjoy the meal and other delights prepared for the altar.

Children working in the city as sweet sellers, shoe-shiners, art-crafts sellers and doing other tasks also take advantage of these three days to get some extra money, or as they say, to ask for their “sweet skull”, (the Mexican version of “treat or trick” of Halloween)⁷⁶. This money is spent on sweets or cheap toys. Some older children share it with their toddler siblings, and some even give it to their parents.

4.8 Conclusion

The children of the colonia Monte Alban belong to a new generation of urban dwellers in the City of Oaxaca. Most of their daily activities revolve around the colonia Monte Alban. These children have experienced the slow but gradual change of economic and infrastructure conditions. Although for many their material conditions are still precarious, there are other aspects of their lives that engage them to their settlement as a unity: their school attendance, the similarity in their daily routines, which includes the work of many minors, gang memberships for some, and the participation in various festivities throughout the year. Although poverty prevails in this settlement, there are other socio-cultural elements that give a more complete view of the environment the children of the colonia live and participate in their daily survival.

⁷⁶ Sweet skull is a skull shape sugar sweet adorned with sugar paste colour and the name of the dead or live person remembered. In the past, more than two decades ago, children use to put candle in a hollow pumpkin and walk on the streets asking pedestrians for pocket money. Today, the custom resembles more the “treat and trick” Euro-American custom where children dress up in a suitable customs and go knocking door by door frightening people and requesting sweets or money.

Chapter 5

The experience of work: shaping notions of work through relationships within the household

5. Introduction

5.1 Relationships within the household

This chapter examines from a relational perspective how the children's experiences of domestic work are constructed (Grint 1991; Archer 1998; Scott 1998; Mayall 2002). Such a perspective allows me to examine how work is experienced from a variety of related social events in daily life. This approach is justified as relationships occur in the interplay of agents with the social context, which ultimately influence and are influenced by these experiences (see Archer 1995: 12). Work in this sense is not a predetermined experience. It is constructed on a day to day basis through relationships which vary according to various social factors and social categories to which children adapt. Thus, here I focus on how daily relationships influence the way children and parents perceive their own experiences of work. The household being the place where basic domestic functions, such as production, consumption, reproduction and socialisation take place among individuals becomes socially significant in understanding the position of children and the meanings created through domestic relationships (Chayanov 1986; Lloyd & Gage-Brandon 1993).

The household organisation comprises of productive and domestic activities, which are performed according to a domestic division of labour. This division entails a series of factors that shape the relationships within the household. Such factors are age, gender, ethnicity and generation, which influence decision making in keeping or placing members in household work or the labour market. These variables will be examined empirically in what has been proposed as the paradigm of childhood as a social construction (Jenks 1996; James & Prout 1997; Solberg 1997; James et al. 1998) and analysed from the perspective of relational processes (Archer 1998; Scott 1998; Mayall 2002). From these combined perspectives, children are believed to be continuously reconstructing and experiencing childhood within multidirectional relationships. Relationships allow children to establish links with diverse agents in

order to negotiate their status and to participate in various degrees in decision-making processes. So, these relationships are the means by which children shape their notions of work and childhood within their society.

By analysing statements by people of different generations, it was possible to arrive at an understanding of the attitudes and ideas towards work by both children and adults. Testimonies and observations were also used to examine how work varies for women/girls and men/boys, according to social patterns established in terms of gender roles and actual role performances. Moreover, the analysis focused on the way these are related to the past and present ideas of work. Extracts of testimonies or interviews are combined to illustrate the significance of the analysis and how representative these are for the overall sample.

The structure of this chapter is as follows: The first part (section 5.2) deals with the variables of generation, gender and age. These variables will be examined in order to see how they influence children's notions of work, and how these are related to household relationships in a temporal and contextual basis. The second part (section 5.3) examines the dynamics of domestic relationships from children's points of view and how these influence children's notions of work and agency. Finally, the third part (section 5.4) examines the interplay of all these variables in understanding how relationships allow children to negotiate their positions according to the way in which work is allocated and the support that exists within the household.

5.2 Generation, gender and age categories

The social categories influencing domestic relationships allow me to compare how children and their parents live the experience of work in the colonia Monte Alban. From each of these categories, it is possible to comprehend the implicit meanings of notions of work and the way each generation and gender group conceives them: for instance, how a generation of people identify with a specific event or activity, which younger generations may not be able to comprehend or completely grasp (Mayall 2002). In the case of gender, the observations lead us to understand how girls and boys, or women and men have different views about unpaid and paid work, family contribution and the differences of household commitment and responsibility. Age is

a relative term (Baker 1998). The age category becomes more apparent in the daily interactions of children and the significant events they face, which allow them to identify with a certain age group. Age groups do not necessarily correspond to any legal or pre-established categories, but to the ways in which diverse cultures conceive age (Montgomery 2003: 69). Gender is also treated as a relative category. Gender allows people to manipulate and construct their own manifestations of it through everyday life. So as an adaptable category, gender as a variable, is rather reconstructed throughout relationships than prescribed (Lorber 1994). Overall, the work experience from a generational, age and gender perspective is dynamically defined. This premise, as we shall see in the following sections, is reflected in most of the children's and their parents' accounts.

5.2.1 Generation

The variable 'generation' serves to trace differences in the cohorts of people involved in understanding the experience of work. Adults and children are marked by differences in socio-cultural events that influence their values towards work and family (Mayall 2002). Within relationships, children are engaged in cross-temporal relations that affect the way their present lives are shaped. As stated by Mayall (ibid.), children's interactions within their households depend not only on their access to resources, but on the way in which general socioeconomic circumstances affect these daily interactions, which are also influenced by the past experiences of other family members (Mayall 2002: 28).

According to Mayall (2002), a generational cohort, or a group of adults born around the same time, regard themselves as 'co-habiting' a generation and so can share similar values, ideas and experiences, in contrast to other cohorts in the same family or household. In this study, children certainly identify themselves clearly as a generation different to the one of their parents:

When my father was a young man, he used to go to the rodeo in his village...but you just sit and see... it is nice... but I prefer to participate in other activities like when me and my friends play basketball or arcade games... it is more exciting... (Ricardo 14, boy).

The experiences of work differ and, therefore, the notions and values both generations grasp are different according to local or major socio-historical moments, which define them as group (Garcia & Hernandez 1992; Balagopalan 2002):

I very well remember how my husband's family helped us when the coffee crops were not good for two years in a row...His father had more land than us and it was more than enough to provide for them and more people. So, he asked my husband to work in his fields... I joined too and we also worked for those two years in their milpa [corn fields] ...so we were not hungry... They supported us by letting us work in their fields and share their crops with them...we looked after each other over there...here you cannot do that, it is not the same...everything here has to be paid...even favours ... (Sirenia, mother).

I have never really worked in a coffee field or a milpa like my mother...I don't think I could get used to the work there, as there are no amenities as in here...I prefer to obtain some money than to get paid in crops... coffee or corn you eat them or sell them for other food, but with money you can buy anything...(Rosalia 15, girl).

Sirenia a mother of four was born and grew up in a peasant village, where cash exchanges and job opportunities are all related to agrarian activities. Production and thus work depend on the geographical and climatic conditions. So, when these affect the crops badly, families in the villages tend to either support each other, or to migrate to other villages or cities (Bartra 1974; Guillermo de la Pena 1993). In her family's case, the first choice was more suitable, although through the years, the second became more attainable when crops continued going bad and the agrarian economy in general suffered the discontinuity of state subsidies (De Teresa 1991). Sirenia and her husband moved to Oaxaca City where they found paid work. Rosalia is not alien to their parents' original lifestyle in the countryside, but having been a cash-earner herself, she values the idea of paid labour, rather than agrarian work, based on other cultural ideas of work and survival. Whereas in the agrarian village productivity is

based on periodical long term crops, limited variety of products, and narrow cash interactions, and where most work relies on family members in non-labour relationships, in the city, it entails non-family relationships as well. In urban areas, paid work is instead almost the only way to obtain cash and the periods of cash exchanges are closer and more or less specified according to the demand of skilled and non-skilled labour (Pepin-Lehalleur 1976; Phal 1984). So, whereas Rosalia believes that urban work suits her family's life style, Sirenia, in contrast, seems to value the support of the peasant community and the fact that the people seem to be more attentive to everyone's material and emotional needs.

Working in a rural society entails the knowledge of other needs and ways of conceiving the world. The children's generation, at present, has characteristics that relates them to their parents' rural background, though also shows that their needs differ from those of their parents. In studying cross-generational differences, it was also observable how the relationships of seniority and authority permeate domestic relationships in working terms. Children in seniority relationships occupy the bottom of the hierarchy. In rural communities, their presence and activities are usually considered of low value (see also Nieuwenhuys 2000: 282). In my empirical data I observed different patterns of authority, which have been also observed in previous cross-cultural studies (Estrada 1995; Salazar 1998; Kenny 1997; Tracynsky 2003). As I witnessed, children also reveal their own ideas about authority when challenging it. This, for instance, contrasts to the idea of previous generations (the ones born before moving to the colonia), where there is an implicit belief that authority is incontestable (see Goodnow and Wharton 1991; Caputo 1995; LeVine 1998; Regt 2004):

You would never dare to answer back to your parents...we were not even asked to do our chores, because we were expected to carry them out on our own initiative...The children of today are very rude, and even when the parents teach them manners, they do not respect the authority of the adults who care for them... (Maria, mother).

Although there are some similarities towards the values shared between generations in terms of work practices, there is also a different awareness of personhood and individuality. Related to these elements, the sense of community and support has

changed for the generations involved. From pervading almost every aspect of rural life, in the case of the parents and grandparents, today it is focused on striving to maintain some degree of individuality and express personal characteristics. It seems that children perceive urban spaces and urban work as offering more choices at a personal level, in contrast to their parents' beliefs in strong community solidarity, respect and family productivity (cf. Tejera Gaona 1993). In this sense, work is lived not only as a collective or family experience in a day to day basis, but also as an individual one, where personal interests arise creating conflicts within the household. Generational differences, grasping individuality and personhood, become more latent during conflictive moments, and are judged according to the way work is experienced by children and parents at different moments, as a grandmother expressed recalling life in her village:

There is no space for spoiled children [in the villages]. Everybody has to work, there is no other way to live. The father is the one with the authority. At their age I was planting corn and harvesting two times a year, along with everyone else except the very young children. In between, still there were lots of things to do, like cleaning weeds almost everyday, taking the animals to eat in the meadows, go to the mill every morning and prepare tortillas, the breakfast... If they only knew...I don't understand why these children want to "rule" their parents' lives. It should be the opposite but I better not interfere... (Doña Concha, grandmother)

In contrast, her granddaughter expresses a different perception about work and cooperation within the family as angling her own sense of personhood and authority. Maricruz, a 9 year old girl helps her mother to sell and charge for Avon products going house to house around the neighbourhood

I don't like to go and ask people around to pay their debts... They don't always pay when I come. So I have to come back two or three times... Sometimes I go even when it's raining or very cold. But If I argue I don't [want to go], my mother gets upset or annoyed. Sometimes she shouts at me until I finally go... I like it when people pay their debts punctually... I like it when my mother gives me

perfumes of Avon or make up. I play with my sisters to be beauty dressers
(Maricruz 9, girl)

Some of her mother's customers in the neighbourhood complained that Maricruz has very bad manners and can be rude at times:

That girl has a strong character... She likes to answer back and doesn't care if it is a woman, a man, an old lady or even her grandmother... She just wants to be paid and really gives a hard time to people when they cannot pay when she comes around... (Irma 32, woman)

5.2.2 Gender

In children's daily relationships, the part played by the category 'gender' becomes particularly heightened in terms of work when puberty starts, as has been found elsewhere (Lloyd 1993; Mayall 2002). This however, does not mean that at early ages gender differences do not exist (Stainton Rogers, W. 2003: 193). As mentioned earlier, boys and girls are expected to play an important role in contributing to household survival at a very young age (Whiting 1988). In my own sample, I observed that there is a strong tendency to encourage boys to work for wages, whereas girls are usually used to occupy themselves in domestic activities (Salazar 1991). While boys are regarded as "contributors" to the household income, girls' work is typically taken for granted, even though the work that they do is of vital importance for household reproduction.

However, these differences were more subtle than I had expected after comparing my own observations and the testimonies of the children in the colonia to the literature (Ennew & Milne 1989; Reynolds 1991; Neuwenuhuys 1994; Green 1998; Punch 2000, 2001). As Punch points out in her study of Bolivian children, children's participation in household work '...does not merely mirror the adults division of labour in rural households' (Punch 2001: 804) It was possible to observe that children constantly transgressed gender boundaries, as boys' and girls' activities often overlapped, thus bringing into question the assumed values by their parents and the larger society. This

phenomenon was not limited to the children, but was also observed in adult productive roles (see also Solberg 2001: 116):

I was a baby when my father left...I don't know him...never met him. My mother never talks of him...my sisters say he left my mother to live with his other family in the States [United]...He sent some money while I was little, but when my mother learned about his second family, he never sent anything else...My mother kept working when my father did not come back, as my sisters did it too... In the meantime, I had to go to school and in the afternoons I stayed at home, helping around, keeping it clean and baby sitting my baby sister Sonia...I don't mind cleaning around the house or taking care of Sonia, it is only fair...for all those things my mother does for us (Jose Alberto 16, boy).

Gender in this case may become manipulated, to some extent, to serve the purpose of the survival of the household. In such a case, activities are not assigned to traditional gender roles, but to a pragmatic productive organisation within the family, where social or personal opportunities, expectations and experiences come also into play (Stainton Rogers, W. 2003: 207). This does not mean that women and boys transmute into their opposite genders, but they make the most of them, serving the family objective of survival. For instance, Jose Alberto still maintained his 'maleness' while focusing everyday endeavours in achieving a professional career that may offer him and his family a source for social mobility. Jose Alberto, for his age, was most of the time economically dependent on his mother's income, as was the rest of his family. He could though contribute by working like other children of his age, but he did not⁷⁷. Thus, in this case, gender appears as a dynamic category, adjusted to the household circumstances, rather to a pre-social category which typically defines Jose Alberto and his family gender roles. Gender, in this case, is open to adaptation and therefore, one observes how relationships and the day to day interactions allow constructing an experience of gender where the need for survival strongly influences it.

Another example of the category of gender related to children's productive status was Jesus (15, boy). Jesus worked as a shop assistant in a grocery store, close to his

⁷⁷ Jose Alberto found a part-time few weeks before I left in a printing workshop.

school. He was in charge of cleaning, accommodating the stock, and supervising the arcade game machines, his favourite activity. He earned about £1.70 per day, working four hours from Friday to Sunday. He was the youngest child of four children. Jesus spent his earnings on himself: he bought a pair of label trainers and a tracksuit among other small things, while he worked in the shop for six months before starting college. During his school year, Jesus worked as his brother's assistant in a carpenters' workshop. There, besides assisting, he learned some basic techniques and built a dining table and a plate rack for his mother's kitchen. His domestic contribution was limited to tidying up his bedroom and doing his own laundry. Jesus believed that men's economic contribution although important, is not the only one in a family:

Because I never met my father, he was never needed in the family...we learned to survive without him...My mother has always worked hard for us...my elder sisters took care of me...not only because I'm a boy, but because they see me as 'a baby' ...I think families can survive without fathers...of course it might be better to have one that cares for you, brings money and loves you... but we are very well as we are... we've managed until now... (Jesus, 15, boy).

This excerpt shows how children do not conform to traditional gender roles, but adapt and participate to the way their households are structured. Though, Jesus' mother has stronger views about gender roles, and that is how he expresses it. In the case of Jesus' mother, as a steady worker in the local offices of the national telecommunications company (Telmex), she was the main provider, so her children did not have to engage in permanent paid work. Jesus' work was believed to be formative, more than economically necessary for the household:

He has to learn to be responsible, not only working for money, but helping around the house, because one day he will have a family too... (Maria, Jesus' mother).

As I observed in other family cases, the stereotypically expected gender roles by society are constantly overridden by most of the children of the colonia Monte Alban, as it occurs in other societies (Punch 2001). This is due to the need of contributing to the household income and to the way the households are structured (i.e., mono-

parental). The effects of migration on the way children perceive gender and work can be seen in how daily activities do not always correspond to ideals of gender roles. The prolonged absences of fathers and the inevitable involvement of adult women in the labour market influence the way boys and girls see themselves with respect to their place in family gender relations.

Rosalía must study if she doesn't want to be mistreated by men... her education will support her to find a good job...she won't depend on her husband...but she has to find a responsible man, as both have to take care of the family... (Sirenia, mother).

However, views between fathers and mothers differ when it comes to children's learning the opposite gender roles. Women tend to be more understanding about the degree of transgression of standard gender roles overlap between the work of men and women, as Sirenia expresses it. Whereas in their narratives, men are less tolerant to these equalities, though in fact, many of them spend significant time attending domestic work around the house:

Mario, the father of Antonia [11] and her siblings, was cooking some "huevos rancheros" [spicy fried eggs] for his four children, when I came to see them after school hours. Patricia, the mother, had to go to work in the kindergarten to do her usual job (cleaning classrooms every second day, for two hours). I've noticed that what he says about women staying at home and looking after the children, does not really coincide with what I've seen him doing not only today, but in other occasions as well. He does take care of his children and seems to enjoy it. Antonia [the eldest daughter] complains that her mother is never at home when they come back [Antonia and her siblings], but she also says that she 'loves' her father's cooking, by stating the old cliché: "'men are better cooks than women', my father is anyway, even if he only cooks fried eggs, and that is why I like him to stay at home. He can also make tortillas, and prepare amarillito [stew], rice and chicken soup... he is very good at cooking and looking after us..." After he cooked and served his four children, he sat to eat with them, while trying to pacify Mariana [7] and Miguel [5] [the younger children]. After the meal, Mario asked Irene and Antonia to clear the

table and wash the dishes, while he fed the dogs and the roosters (diary notes, 12/11/2000).

Gender differences are actually subtler than they appear when it comes to domestic work. The need for adult women to engage in paid work, and the limited opportunities for male labour, often oblige men to remain at home for long periods, to carry out domestic work and to take care of their children. So as in the case of children, the way households organise daily work, the availability of adult jobs and the need for child care, place girls and boys in adopting their gender roles to the everyday needs for survival. Therefore, gender roles are constructed in everyday relationships (Lorber 1994), and are adaptable to daily circumstances, even for some adults (the case of Mario).

5.2.3 Age

In recent studies, the category of 'age' has come under scrutiny (James 1983, Baker 1998, Lee 2001) with suggestions that in real terms, 'age' can be a very misleading concept in understanding children's potential to participate in decision making, from a chronological point of view (cf. Mead & Wolfenstein 1955; Fukui 2000). As Lee (2001) points out, some Western contemporary societies have reached a stage that age division has been eroded and children are now seen to be capable of decision making (Solberg 1997, 2001; Becker et al. 2001; Song 2001; Kjørholt 2002). Though, legal frameworks in various countries still sustain the illegibility of children to participate in decision making concerning social institutions (i.e., electing political figures) (Holt 1975; Purdy 1992). The children in colonia Monte Alban, as will be shown later, enter into the mentioned category of active participants with some decision making ability. Age boundaries are more representative in relationships entailing official structures (such as school or some forms of paid work), than in children's own experiences. Thus, underage children may be supporting their families financially as adults do, however, they do not enjoy the same legal rights and obligations and adults do (Holt 1975; Buckingham 2003). Although, within households in Oaxaca, a certain sense of age differences in caring for the younger children and the weak are considered, still children seem to be more able to adjust themselves into diverse age categories. In other socio-cultural contexts, children would be excluded from participating in adult

activities such as community vote and family decision-making (Salazar 1998: 160). However, this is not observed in the colonia Monte Alban, as children tend to enjoy some participation in the organisation of community work (see chapter 7).

Although legally the age of majority in Mexico is at 18 years, and to work is only allowed with the parents' permission at the age of 14 to 16 years old (Article 123, Mexican Constitution)⁷⁸, children in the colonia have different ideas about what being a 'child' means. For most, children are considered those ones who attend elementary school, from the age of six to twelve, or cursing six grades. After completing this stage, particularly in the case of boys, children are considered mature enough to work and provide for their household (see also Taracena 2003: 314). In the case of girls, although the risk of getting married exists after completing elementary school, parents try to persuade and delay the prospect of marriage until girls reach their 15th birthday, a period when girls are considered to be young women (see chapter 7).

Alicia is still a girl and as her parents we have to look after her, not to have a boyfriend and get married so young...she will be a young lady after her 15th birthday, but even so, we won't let her get married. She has to make the best of the opportunities she will have in the future... (Chela, mother).

Children that attend [elementary] school are still children...I'm not...I have a job and I have to give some money to my parents...Jaime for instance [his neighbour] still is a child because he only plays with his brothers and friends...I do like to play, but only after work...⁷⁹ (Felipe 13, boy).

⁷⁸ Children between ages 14 and 16 years are allowed to work a maximum of six hours per day. Overnight work is prohibited for this cohort (Legislacion Federal, 2004).

⁷⁹ There is not a definitive term used to describe the status of children such as Felipe. He does not consider himself a child, but neither does he believe he is a man. His age identity is defined not only through the activities and responsibilities to which he refers, but by the people he relates to, particularly the same age people. Thus, terms such as 'mate', 'friend', 'comrade' or '*cabron*' (literally male goat, but socially someone considered very macho and careless of others) are more in tune to Felipe's and other children of his generation's identity (see also Baker 1998, for her description of *Khate* in Kathmandu). In the colonia Monte Alban, parents tend to define them as 'little men' for endeavouring to acquire adult man-like status in terms of work, responsibility and leisure activities. However, their sons perceive this descriptive term as diminutive and a separation from real men, more as a defining term of their own experience.

In contrast to parents' notions of age related to work and what they call "age of responsibility", the effects of urban life have influenced alternative age notions, thus segmenting groups in other categories and redefining age meanings. Maturity within the new generation is conceived as a matter of responsibility towards themselves and the fulfilment of opportunities presented, such as education and work. The maturity is not only deemed from a reproductive and productive point of view (sexual and economic), but also from one related to the social environment to which children relate. Education expectations have changed between generations, thus, the age of maturity is believed to be adherent to how far their education attainment gets. So, although for Felipe maturity starts at the age when a child completes his basic education and starts a serious job (children like Felipe actually feel offended when they are addressed as 'children'), for other children adolescence has become a transitory period between childhood and adulthood as in the case of Damian:

It's better to study and help around the house than to start working when you're a child.... It limits your chances to get better jobs in the future. It can be a sacrifice for the family, but if you study and become a professional, you can always return the support you receive from your family. That's better than to have odd jobs when you're little and have nothing let when you're an adult...I mean, nothing is guaranteed... (Damian 16, boy).

According to Damian's view, maturity has to be forged and not just reached when reaching a certain stage, socially recognised (see also Nader 1964; Taracena 2003). In real terms, however, there are marked differences in the age related literature, directly linked to gender differences and productivity (Punch 2001). For boys, reaching adulthood is a very ambiguous process. It is some kinds of activities which define boyhood, as well as relationships and the way other individuals think of as boys or men, as it was presented in the case of Felipe. As for girls however, this transition between childhood and adulthood is more clearly marked not only by their sexual potential, but by the way they engage in domestic work and family responsibilities, which is regarded as a preparation for marriage. Though, with the increasing influence of education and globalisation, these stages are becoming blurred (Montgomery 2003: 69). Long term education, especially college, is seen as a process which labels a novel

stage not experienced by the parents. They struggle between work, education and family, while at the same time, children try to understand, from their generational perspective, the meanings of them fitting into a sole universal category. This is evident when they learn at school and at their own neighbourhood (through the local NGO) about children's rights and Western childhood (see Burr & Montgomery 2003: 159; Aitken 2001: 120):

I know most of the rights of the children. I learned them with Dolores and Sandra in Child to Child...I like to hear about other children's stories...when we see some of the pictures of the books they bring to us... we study if those children of other countries are like us or not...I think many are as us...they are of different places and other languages, but we are all children, poor or rich..., aren't we? (Antonia 11, girl).

Children's struggle of building an identity that fits the local middle class values and concepts, somehow, influences alternative parental conceptions to the constructions of age and gender (see Green 1998; Punch 2001). Therefore, 'age' as a social category, is a very relative term, that in practice is manipulated according to the circumstances and the relationships in every society (Baker 1998; Kenny 1997; Punch 2001).

5.2.4 The interplay of gender, age and generation in the light of work

Childhood in the colonia Monte Alban consists of participating in a series of productive activities that do not necessarily limit children's ability to negotiate within the realm of the household, the school and the work place. Work, in this case, bridges the public and private domain, which ultimately erodes the classical notions of the seclusion of children being contained within the private sphere (Green 1998). It is through work that children are able to participate in larger social relationships within the community and the urban space (the city), as individuals influencing their immediate social environment, as Mayall (2002) expresses it:

The social relations of agency and structure require children to work with and against structures with 'ontological depth', with characteristics rooted in the past, such as ideas about childhoods, education, parent-child relationships. As

generation, children take on board notions of shared social status and shared experience with people at different stages of childhood, but all living through childhoods as understood as a specific period of historical time in a given society (Mayall 2002: 41).

Generally speaking, all the categories mentioned above, combine in shaping the experience of children's work and their relationships within the household. Children's work participation poses greater implications in household relationships, as they liberate adults from experiencing greater loads of domestic work, especially for women. Children's work also challenges adults' general idea of socially determined roles i.e., where children act as repositories of the provision of their parents and become absent in productive participation (see Green 1998). In Oaxaca, parents expect their children to provide for present and future household needs. Children are considered as investment not only to sustain their present lifestyles, but to provide the eldest with economic and emotional care (Baker 1998).

In Mexico, with the continuous economic recessions, households have reached a stage where social norms and gender-expected roles have been modified in order for the households to adjust to changed economic circumstances. Women now have a more dynamic role in the labour market as families struggle to adjust to changing socioeconomic conditions (see Chant 1985). Children attend school and thus may be perceived as restricting their productive time to non-productive activities (Nieuwenhuys 1994). Schooling is generally seen as an investment in long term gains. Parents and children are faced with a constant dilemma between seeking future gains, and having to make possible daily survival (Patrinos et al. 1997; Basu 1999). In contrast to what is observed in some Western societies where school attendance is considered as work (Qvortrup 1985; Mayall 2002; Larson 2004), in non-Western societies, such as the colonia, this idea still has not really developed in the same manner, as children have to work in substantial ways. Attending school in the short term, is seen for many families as an obstacle more than an advantage to their households' survival (Kenny 1997), or the way for social mobility (see Murphy & Stepick 1991; Chant 1991; Estrada 2000). Household is defined by its relationships. However, it has to survive, finding the means to sustain its members, while providing emotional support. Work in this context, entails a variety of meanings, which go

beyond the satisfaction of material needs (Estrada 1996). It provides for family cohesion and gives meaning to people's lives, guiding and shaping them, in many different ways (Pahl 1984).

5.3 Children's roles in the domestic division of work

Typically, the role of children in the domestic division of labour has been seen as a part of survival strategies implemented in the life cycles of the various households (Chant 1988; Gonzalez de la Rocha 1994). From this perspective, children's work is treated as a survival strategy for maintaining household livelihood security in the face of socio-economic circumstances which affect them at the domestic level. However, in approaching the essence of children's work, it has been seen that the character of children's economic participation depends to a great extent on the household composition (Chant 1984; Lloyd & Gage-Brandon 1993; Gonzalez de la Rocha 1995; Solberg 1997). Children's work not only contributes to their family's livelihood, but creates links between domestic and non-domestic environments. James (1983) refers to it as 'children's creativity', in relating to other people and performing specific activities. It has been observed in other studies, that children's experiences of work can vary according to their conceptions of gender (Bekombo 1981; Salazar 1998; Lange 2000; Nieuwenhuys 1994, 2000). Boys and girls have different perceptions of their roles as socially expected and as individually experienced; they even differ between the domestic milieu sphere and the productive sphere (Salazar 1998: 165).

As reviewed so far, the household in the colonia is the basic unit of organization of reproductive and productive activities. "People's experiences and their everyday activities are structured by the material conditions of their social positioning" (Mayall 2002: 25). Besides the material conditions, there are other characteristics of the household that determine how its structure is organised: household composition, allocation of tasks and prospective income. In what follows, I examine the roles of children contributing to their household wellbeing.

5.3.1 Boys' and girls' household's contribution

There is a tendency to expect boys to do better than girls in school performance or paid jobs. This is because usually girls engage in employment earlier than boys in order to support younger siblings' education, usually men (Salazar 1998). In the colonia Monte Alban, boys are positioned in visible paid jobs as carpenters, street sellers, manual workers, shop assistants, etc. Most boys manage to combine work with education, being the later either seasonal or part time. Whereas, in the case of girls, the tendency is to work in the household or in domestic paid activities, and to abandon school at earlier stages than boys (secondary or preparatory school). So, the children's experiences of work diverge according to their gender and the values attached to their generation:

Jose Alberto recently got a job as a graphic designer assistant. He is working part time in the afternoons, and in the mornings he attends his Design classes in the COBAO [Technical Preparatory]. I know we make many sacrifices for him to have a decent education, but it's been worth it... We are so proud of all his efforts, but it was not easy with his father being away and only his mother supporting him. He's such a clever boy (Don Agustin, grandfather).

Children such as Jose Alberto are the ones, the men particularly, who seem to take advantage of the available education opportunities, by combining work and school. Their education is seen as a good investment by their families who expect ultimately to obtain economic benefits, so as to upgrade socially as a household. Whereas, other boys become fully employed and able to participate in domestic decision making:

From the beginning I agreed with my parents that I will keep half of my wages for my own expenses and other things...they said it was fine because I'm not a child and I'm helping them out anyway... (Felipe 13, boy).

In these cases, it is observed how some families privilege education, whereas others do not discourage child employment. By obtaining parents' own labour histories, it was possible to see how their values, work and education experiences influenced their son's perceptions on these very same subjects. Whereas Jose Alberto's mother is a

trained nurse, Felipe's parents managed to complete some years of elementary education. Also, gender values of their parents have influenced the way both children perceive themselves in their respective productive plans. Jose Alberto seems to advocate more understanding towards women's work, whereas Felipe holds more traditional rural beliefs on masculine and feminine roles within family and work shared with his parents. In these cases, however, the only similarity in their productive roles is that both are expected to contribute to their families' well-being, either through education as a long term goal, or as an early income contribution through employment. So, in these cases, it is possible to observe how relationships of gender and generation influence and somehow guide the boys' own ideas of productive roles. In both cases, their gender is a strong element that allows them to partially participate in decision making, but which at the same time limits their own sense of individuality and personhood through the values each household retains.

Girls on the other hand, who have heavier loads of work in addition to daily school attendance, seem to exert more autonomy and individuality in everyday activities, as they are perceived as a skilful preparation for their own well being, i.e., deciding the menu for the day, organizing younger siblings' activities (Punch 2001). Autonomy and individuality should not be confused with the more economic independence boys are able to exercise as they approach puberty or adulthood. As I observed, this is a result of the expectations families and girls have of their future. Girls are engaged in paid work and housework, as parents believe it prepares them for marriage (Stainton Rogers W 2003: 207). Their education is thus considered as a temporary stage. As this way of thinking prevails and the economic pressure is less than towards boys, it is immaterial whether girls at the end of the day can excel at school, or abandon it at early stages. (ibid.). This brings into question the availability of girls to work beyond school age and provide for their household, in spite of a strong social encouragement to offer girls the same education and job opportunities (ibid.: 209; SEP, Mexican Constitution). Hence, many parents in the colonia believe that investing in women's education might be pointless, as a father of five says referring to his elder daughter:

At the end she is going to get married, because she will be a woman very soon... if she was a boy instead, it would be better for her to study something useful, but

girls always get married and the parents lose them. What's the point of all those studies? As their parents we won't get anything [back]... (Ramiro, father)

From the girls' own point of view, paid work and school attendance are regarded as activities that provide them with some cash. Paid work is also considered as conferring them the opportunity to escape domestic routine and establish other relationships beyond the household as noticed in the next excerpt of an interview to Irasema, a 13th year old girl:

Laura: So, did your mother give you permission to work in the market?

Irasema: I asked my father first, but he said that if my mother said yes, he would say yes too. He said that he preferred if I concentrated on studying, but my mother said that some money for my expenses was not bad... mainly because my father cannot find a job now that he is ill.⁸⁰

L: What did you think when she agreed to give you permission?

I: I was very happy because I want to help her and at the same time do something different from housework.

L: And what did your father say about it?

I: That he hopes I can manage to do both things at the same time, but nothing else.

As I observed, girls tend to work along with their mothers, either by performing the same type of jobs, or by working in the same places. Girls' employment is a result usually of the absence of the migrant fathers, or the inability for them to engage in full time employment.

'He [father] came back drunk again last Friday. I had to go to work with my mother... When my father drinks for many days, obviously he cannot work... so I have to go to the market and sell the clothes on the market's floor [sic], for which my mother pays rent...' (Alicia 14, girl)

⁸⁰ Irasema's father was ill and unemployed at the time and resorted to drinking despite his medical condition. He was often feeling depressed and suffering from hangovers which rendered him of not help to his family.

Usually, women in mono-parental households, or those with sub-employed or unemployed husbands, become primary providers along with the cooperation of young daughters and sons. Although children in this sense are not regarded as co-providers by adults, in real terms, their income may be considered as a substitute of men adult contributions (see also Kenny 1998).

Socially, children's role as co-providers still remains without much recognition, particularly when it refers to gender differences. Girls' domestic contributions and overloads are taken for granted and referred to as "naturally" expected from girls, whereas, the rest of the family benefits from their domestic work (see also Ennew & Milne 1989; Stainton Rogers W. 2003).

Whenever they are disobedient or lazy about their chores, I tell them they won't receive food or pocket money if they do not help with the quehacer (domestic workload)... it's a simple task... I did it when I was a child, my mother did it, and it was even harder for me... they must do it if they [the girls] want to find at least a husband. Lazy and untidy women are not very valued out there... (Chela, mother).

At the same time, girls express their desire to receive 'respect for their individuality', their choices and their work at home, as seen in the previous statements. Girls are able to exert some autonomy even in performing housework but also at school related activities, out of the sight of their parents:

I can always listen to music while I do my chores...I enjoy what I do more if there is some music...my parents don't mind...it makes them happy as well...I bought my own radio last year with some savings I had...Listening to music makes me feel relaxed and makes work easier and enjoyable...(Antonia 11, girl).

Parents often contradict themselves when it comes to the degree of autonomy their daughters enjoy:

We let our daughter study because she will get married soon and she will have to look after her family. So working for her is not an important issue...(Sirenia, mother of Rosalia).

She should not continue her studies because she will get married. It is a waste of money and time to study when you are not going to continue your schooling... (Ramiro, father of Rosalia)

However, as girls approach marriageable age, parents tend to tighten their control over their daughters, by keeping them at home as in the following case of Rosalia 15:

[...] I have to say that I'm going to do homework with other classmates. Sometimes we do so, but it takes very little time. The rest of the time, maybe two or three hours, we go to see our friends...my friend Magda has a boyfriend, but I'm not allowed to have one...I have boy friends. That doesn't mean I fancy them all or that I want to be their girlfriend... I just like to spend time with them...they like similar things I like: music, movies... I have many male friends, but if my parents learn that I see boys, they will lock me in ...they want me to concentrate at school, and they say that boys would only distract me from doing well at school... They say it is dangerous to have boys as friends... I know why... they think I will get married and live them behind... I don't want to get married yet... I cannot disappoint them... (Rosalia 15, girl).

At the end of the day, the contradictions of the parent's beliefs and positions lead to many daughters acting on their own and bypassing their parent's authority, as in the case of Rosalia who eventually got married without counting on her parent's permission, even though her action was not totally out of order. Thus roles and authority interplay within a very contradictory framework of parental opinion and control, and often girls are able to challenge and negotiate parental authority and act on their own account, even when their actions are incompatible with the family expectations. In summary, domestic work and cooperation in general, is considered by adults as a socialising activity that prepares children for adulthood. From the children's point of view however, it can become a source of conflict in their relationships as children approach puberty (e.g., Rosalia who is not allowed to

socialise with boys). At this age also, children place themselves in a more dynamic role, though not at all free of problems. Children's more active participation creates difficulties and rivalries between siblings because of parents' differential treatment towards them. Older boys are overtly rewarded so as to encourage their masculine identity, whereas girls are treated more coyly as they are expected to endure masculine patronage in adulthood. But in general, children approaching puberty, tend to express more maturity and independence, and are able to participate in domestic decision making. Eventually alliances form between brothers or between sisters, and sometimes even between siblings and same-gender parents (e.g., sons and fathers). These alliances can lead to significant conflicts of interest within the family, and the weaker members can be excluded from decision making process:

My husband was useless...he was coming back home drunk all the time and beating me even when I was pregnant...that is why my youngest son has speech problems. My husband never provided properly for us, so one day me and my girls kicked him out of the house and he never came back... life can be difficult without a husband, but if he's drinking all the time, he is of no help at all (Chela, mother of five).

The previous statement shows clearly an example where same gender family members (mother and daughters) ally in order to control the household's well being, which is not always an easy or a pleasant task. In the above example one can also witness the dichotomy between middle class families and the ones in the colonia when dealing with family conflicts. The first may tend to resort to legal instances, whereas the second deal with their crisis in a more personal and direct way.

5.3.2 Work, gender and social relationships of children

As social agents, children interpret and appropriate in active ways elements of their cultural universe, which are recreated through generations and interrelationships (James 1983: 38; Mayall 2002). Taking into account this argument, it is possible to perceive how work moderates and regulates everyday relationships, including authority and power relationships. The dynamics of the life within and beyond the household require the participation of all members and this does not occur without

conflict, as in the case of Felipe, age 13, and his sister Carolina, 11 who often engaged in arguments and fights over tasks and chores:

Felipe was bullying me... [Carolina sobs]. I had to wash the uniforms for tomorrow and the dishes of the dinner... but he started teasing me and I got annoyed...then my mum came back. She was very angry and I told her about Felipe interrupting me while I was trying to do the washing. We started fighting and I could neither wash the dishes, nor the uniforms...she says she is tired and cannot do everything...I will help her if I'm allowed to do so... (Carolina 11, girl).

In the case presented above, Carolina knows about the importance of her everyday contribution, but as the older brother interrupts her work, conflict arises due to the displayed roles of each child. Carolina on the one hand has learned to take responsibility of housework, whereas her elder brother brings money from his job as a painter and idles when staying at home. Carolina's mother, later expressed the frustration she constantly feels for not being at home, taking control, and supervising her children's activities:

If I could, I would stay at home, but we cannot afford it... who will pay for food and the bills? Will they [the children], alone? ... I don't think so. They have to learn to cooperate otherwise we will go nowhere [sic]... (Carolina's mother).

In absence of adult authority in Felipe's and Carolina's case, children have taken up different power relationships between them, which nevertheless are filtered through gender differences as well (Lorber 1994). Felipe assumes a position where strength and maleness are expressed in contrast to the position of his sister's expected submission. He assumes a role which somehow undermines his sister's work when he interrupts it or teases her. According to Lorber (1994: 13), gender is created and recreated through human relationships, which in the case of the local society in the colonia Monte Alban reflects the values towards men and women for children. Felipe and Jaime (two boys, aged 13 and 11 respectively) expressed in one interview (when referring to their understanding of work for women and men) that men's paid work seems to be more visible and therefore accountable than women's housework:

Laura: Do you think housework is work?

Felipe: I don't do housework, my mother and my sister do it, and they have to do it because they are women.

L: What about boys and men, do they have to do housework?

F: No, we are men, we have to go to work and get paid, to make sure our families have something to eat and a place to live. Those things cost money... and women don't have to get paid because they don't work...it is their duty to be at home with their children.

L: But they do a lot of things and care for the house and the family. Is this not work?

F: No. I work when I go and I paint all those places. My mother works when she does the laundry for those people in la Reforma, but Carolina, my sister, doesn't work because she just cleans dishes and does some other stuff [at home]...

Jaime: I do some things at home because my mother has to go to work. I have no sisters, so I have to do things that women should do.

F: [giggling] He is like a girl... but he lost his father and there are no girls in his family to help his mother. I feel sorry for Jaime, my friend. He should be working with me instead of staying at home looking after his little brothers...

Felipe's and Jaime's lives revolve around paid jobs, and although Jaime makes a great contribution in domestic terms, he has an ambivalent idea about work and his role within the household, as an economic contributor. In another interview, Jaime told me that the effort of doing housework and keeping things together (family, housework, discipline) required some effort from everyone in the family and, therefore, he thought that this was work in its own virtue. However, 'there is no one to pay for it' and this is another reason for people not to think of it as work, as Jaime also expressed:

I do lots of things at home: I look after my three younger brothers, I cook for them when my mum is not home... I sweep the patio and the house when it's very dusty and I bring home my brother Jorge when he is very drunk... I think that what I do is work because I make an effort to keep things together ... People say children

only play and go to school, but I think that going to school and helping their mothers can be work...(Jaime 11, boy).

Jaime's idea of work and childhood is shaped by his daily experience, his relationships with his family, with friends and with school mates. Within his idea, there seems to be a separation between work and childhood. This also contrasts to what Jaime experiences everyday as 'keeping things together' and striving to fit into his social world, where boys are not supposed to do housework, according to the opposite view of Felipe. His ambivalence has its roots in the lived experience of the roles Jaime and his family assume since his father died a few months before: his widowed mother has acted as a secondary income provider, whereas Jaime combined school, housework and paid work (Jorge, his brother contributed with the primary income). Jaime's account and actions have other implications in the light of the social context: at school and at his job (his part time job as domestic worker) Jaime has learned the diverse roles within families, by observing other children with fathers and mothers who provided for them. What actually structures his life, goes beyond an image of a stereotypical nuclear household, as the one where he worked. In his own household he has assumed the active role of carer and provider, thus blurring age and gender boundaries. Whereas his mother played an inconsistent and passive role as carer and provider (either having a job most of the times or being regularly absent from home), Jaime participated actively, doing household work on his own initiative, while being involved in wage based labour, while reproducing some of the values of his own generation –education being the primary goal. All of this transgresses the notion of a protected childhood while attributing a new significance to gender roles and age differences (Strathern 1988; Lee 2001; Montgomery 2003; Lorber 2003).

The stereotypical differences brought to discussion by Jaime and Felipe, 'reflect [the adult] gender division of labour' (Thorne 2003: 216) in their narratives, which in their cases, create conflictive or ambivalent relationships. At the same time this does not necessarily coincide with the adult way of gendering everyday relationships. In the view of Jaime, it is possible for boys to do things that girls usually carry out. In his idea, what counts is the effort and the way things are kept together to the benefit of all, more than gender differences. This implies that Jaime's household's lack of female members, besides his mother, has encouraged him to perceive his contribution

as real work and as valued from his own experience. Like every other child, his relationships at school and with friends are important to him, as much as his education. However, due to his dual role experience, Jaime is more able to transgress, or cross the gender boundaries, and therefore, to challenge gender roles than other children of his age. He belongs to a significant percentage of children in my sample that have a dynamic view of gender performance within the household.⁸¹ In another example, some girls adopt a more boyish attitude, avoiding traditional women's chores and imitating their brothers or father's attitude (case of Antonia, who aided her father's cock-fighting-betting activities, see appendix).

From the position of Felipe and Carolina, gender roles also arise from their daily relationships and the activities performed. However, in contrast to Jaime, Carolina, who during my interviews expressed a more equitable idea about gender and her relationships at home in terms of work, was passive, disempowered and conflicted by her brother's patronising attitude. By contrast, Felipe took a more powerful role. Felipe seems to emulate his father's patronizing and authoritarian attitude towards other family members. In their relationship, Carolina and Felipe appear to mimic their own parents' conflictive relationships,⁸² reinforcing gender boundaries and power relationships (Chant 1991; Salazar 1998). It seems there is a tendency to reproduce experiences and values between the two generations, despite of the knowledge and experience of other children about alternative economic roles for girls and boys (see Goodnow and Wharton 1991; Nieuwenhuys 2000).

In individual accounts, children such as Jaime, Carolina and Felipe detailed their daily routines and impressions, which often involved work. They recognised the quality of their activities in terms of real contribution to their household survival. Jaime, for instance, attached a strong value to his own involvement at home as a non-gendered responsibility. However, he believed that in order to belong to his household, he also

⁸¹ Jaime's case is comparable to Jesus' situation in section 5.2.2 above.

⁸² Felipe's and Carolina's parents had a conflictive relationship as a result of the alcoholism of the father and the submission of the mother, according to their mother's accounts. Physical and verbal violence had been present since the offer for work for the father decreased due to the opening of service agencies for similar jobs, where the father was not able to find a job due to his own labour background as a self-trained wall painter. The mother, on the other hand, strived to keep her household work while working on a daily basis in different homes as a domestic worker. This demanded the participation of their children to take over and share similar roles, the girl doing their mother's work at home and the boy working as a painter like his father.

had to provide domestic work. In his case this was not an option but a necessity for the survival of his household. This has shaped his idea that contributing to the existence of his family does not have to be a gendered issue, but a contribution which benefits them all. The individual experience of gender roles in Jaime's case opposes the fulfilment of expected social gender roles, or reaffirms it in the case of Felipe and Carolina. The community strongly encourages a 'clear' division between feminine and masculine roles: 'women are weak, not strong enough to take big decisions or do heavy work...' (David, father). Although, women tend to be less rigid about gender differences because they see their children and themselves engaged in daily survival and everyone's contribution, than in terms of power relationships. This though, does not contradict always the fact that girls tend enjoy more autonomy (refer to section 5.3.1 above and Punch 2001: 818).

Young children in many cases are expected to take on roles dictated by their gender, as justification for 'learning to be' women or men. As children get older, and their relationships become more complex, they have to challenge this expectation, which positions them to occupy a role, either as a main provider or a dependent member. These roles, though, in their everyday lives can be constantly varying (Grint 1991: 32). So, from this perspective, work is conceived and defined while being experienced. Thus, gender and work are constructed categories, not only reproduced as pre-established by society (see Strathern 1988; Lorber 1994). This does not necessarily imply that there are no power and authoritarian relationships shaping the way work is experienced, as showed in the example of Felipe and Carolina. My point is that children are able to see work and their relationships as the means to mould their own identity, as being agents with individual characteristics, able to cross role boundaries. This may not always be a positive experience, but the discussion of this issue merits further analysis which is outside the scope of this thesis.

5.4 Generational differences in working experiences

In terms of the parental control over the household, the ideas about authority and relationships between children and other household members, have to be analysed from a generational perspective (Mayall 2002). One of those common values is how important parents think work is for their children:

He just works for pocket money for his school ...My son's work is not a big deal... (Maria, Jesus' mother, referring to her son's part time job).

Parents such as Jesus' mother, claim that due to the "low status" of children, they cannot obtain good working conditions and benefits. As is widespread in child work environments, children's wages are conceived of by some adults as pocket money, particularly by employers, despite the fact that their jobs obey to a structured organisation: fixed time tables, subordination and respect towards adult authority (see Boyden et al. 1998). Ultimately, these notions of work for pocket money contradict what the children themselves claim. Some of them state that the effort of commuting from their homes to the working place merits its recognition; though they agree with the idea that their work is not a 'proper job' (McKechnie & Hobbs 1997). In terms of housework, education and labour prospects, some ideas about the value of work are placed from the point of view of the adult's own experience. To illustrate this, a mother refers to her son's and nephew's educational prospects in contrast to her own experience:

If we were in my parents' village, these two wouldn't have gone to school. They would be planting maize and ploughing instead of attending their college. I became a nurse only because I left the village. I worked hard as a young girl to become what I am today. I was alone, but my parents supported me, and look, we don't have much, but we have our work and our family...These two are doing much better than all the other family [members] (Damian's mother).

Her son has a different idea, but complies to her mother's wishes

I have never worked like my friend Luis. I'd like to work to have my own money and give some to my mother, but she doesn't let me...she says that as long as she lives, I will continue to study...I won't work until I graduate... (Damian 16, boy).

Although children have opinions of their own about domestic work, and work in general, these do not appear as isolated ideas, but as result of their interrelationships in time and place, with other family members. In spite of the social changes, in which

children are deemed to be involved and in this case where some roles apparently seem to persist over generations, in reality what is observed is that every generation holds new and different values according to its place and time (Geertz 1973; Archer 1995: 9). As Damian's mother pointed out, if her children were living in her village, they would likely work in the fields, where the working options are more restrained than in the city. Because though they have widened their opportunities, their sense of achievement has been altered. For Damian, education was the most important thing, (agreeing with his mother) and working was out of the question. Therefore, new values have been integrated into his generation, where education takes prominence over work, even housework. This is a result not only of the change of places, but of the intergenerational relationships, where values are placed into different perspectives. These, however, do not exactly reflect the whole spectrum of the social reality and the individual experiences, as it is shown in the next interview to Lourdes a girl age 13:

Laura: Why are you learning to read and write on your own?

Lourdes: [hesitating]: Mmh ... because I want to be like my friends...

Laura: Like them? You mean a student?

Lourdes: Yes...but I can't because my parents think it's dull...

Laura: What do you think?

Lourdes: I want to be able to know what the buses say in front for instance... or to read the stories in the meetings we have with you or Lola.... I like the pictures in the books...but I also want to know what the words say...

Laura: But what will you do if your parents learn about your lessons with Lola⁸³?

Lourdes: I will tell them...It doesn't interfere with my work...It is like playing anyway...

Laura: What else do you think you can do if you learn to read and write?

Lourdes: Maybe I can work in a shop in the city centre...I don't want to be a maid always... I need to learn school stuff...

Laura: Do you think you can ever work in a shop?

Lourdes: Only if I learn to read and make arithmetic operations...Maybe if I learn more, I can become a secretary...Rosalia said she can teach me the things she is learning at college...

Laura: Would your parents like you being a secretary?

⁸³ Lola was an NGO volunteer living in the same neighbourhood.

Lourdes: My parents say that we should be proud to be hard workers... and be satisfied with what we have...

Laura: Are you satisfied?

Lourdes: Yes, but I want to learn things...and to have a better job...I can help my parents better afterwards.

Laura: How can you help them?

Laura: So they won't have to work that much... Only me and my siblings could support them...That is good, isn't it?

Lourdes, the youngest of four children and one of the two daughters, worked full time as a maid in the Reforma neighbourhood. Illiterate, Lourdes soon realised, when interacting with friends in the colonia, the importance of basic literacy and numeracy. Forbidden to attend school, Lourdes found the way to learn letter and words with her friends without her parents' consent. Her father was not convinced about the idea of his children attending school and claimed that they would gain more by keeping working and providing for the household (see also Nieuwenhuys 1994). Here, I realised how parental authority was contested and negotiated by a child whose social interactions with other children gave her the initiative to act on her own account (Thomson & Holland 2002). This case also shows how the generation values contrasted, even though Lourdes was, to some extent, following the same parental working path. In contrast to Damian's situation, encouragement to achieve a good school performance was completely absent in Lourdes' family idea of accomplishment and future plans. However, support to work was of primary concern for both parents.

Lourdes and her three siblings were working since the age of seven, first as apprentices and later in wage-based jobs. The girls worked as domestic workers and the boys were employed as manual workers in construction. Lourdes says they have to obey their parents, because they know better than their children. Children such as Lourdes have a strong sense of obedience towards their parents: 'My father says I have to be obedient, because I can be punished if I am not' (Lourdes 13, girl), but Lourdes has also found ways to contest her parents' decisions. Despite being placed in a role of provider rather than receiver, she was not able to participate in the decision to attend school or not (cf. Kenny 1997).

Ultimately, Lourdes managed to learn basic reading skills with the support of a neighbour. Limitations to obedience and patronage have been blurred by Lourdes's active decision of learning to read on her own. This has helped Lourdes to escape her parents' control and made her more self-aware of the type of decisions she could make (McNamee 2000: 483). Lourdes sees herself as moving socially upwards by obtaining a better job in the city, as a shop attendant or even a secretary. Her social relationships with other children and adults showed her alternative ways to regard herself in the labour domain. So, she wanted to have a minimum degree of literacy by starting on her own and later enrolling in some courses. I felt that Lourdes was expressing some pride in taking the initiative to learn on her own. Her case is not the only one, as other children were on the opposite side, subtly contesting their parents' decisions to follow school instead of working, or getting married.

In contrast to other children, Lourdes' work does not bestow her with the same sense of independence and autonomy over her work, in relation to her family. Lourdes felt limited by her parents' more traditional ideas about children and survival (compare to Niuwenhuys 2000; Qvortrup 2001; Hollos 2002), where the agrarian lifestyle has just been transferred to the urban context (Lewis 1959; Arias 1992). Whereas Damian resorts to a more flexible approach his mother has towards children and their preoccupation with the future, there is some acknowledgment about them having to adapt to newer socio-cultural contexts. Lourdes' family considers its interest in short term material gains. At the same time, Lourdes wants to upgrade herself and enjoy a better working experience.

As discussed so far, children are embedded in a certain context and relationships. They are not passive, but active in learning about their environment without drastically altering it. They integrate the knowledge that relationships with their parents propound to them with their own experience, which gives them a certain sense of individuality. However the decision to work or not is influenced by the dynamics of the household and the relationships (among other socioeconomic factors). Thus children are not able to choose alone not to work or not to study as in the case of Lourdes and Damian. Children, in contrast to their parents' generation are better equipped to negotiate though not always able to deal with decisions involving work or

its allocation. The latter reflect not only a family tradition and structure, but a wider socioeconomic framework and the degree of financial hardship that characterizes the households of the colonia Monte Alban. Gender is a decisive factor when children are required to work for money and intergenerational characteristics are highlighted in different accounts of working children. This only confirms that there are not isolated events, but an expression of diverse relationships influencing the social context where they take place (Archer 1995).

5.5 Conclusions

As explained in the introduction to this chapter, relationships are the mechanisms used by children, to establish links with diverse agents in order to negotiate their status and participate to a lesser or greater extent, in decision-making processes. These relationships are the means by which children shape their notions of work and childhood within their society.

The interviews in this chapter reveal a broader picture of some inter-generational ideas in terms of work experiences and the influence these have over children's own understandings (see Mayall 2002). Relationships with other people and in their social context are the elements that define the way children and parents conceive the world of productivity. Hence, working children in the colonia Monte Alban do not act independently from the sphere of influence defined by the household dynamics and broader social relationships. However, due to their agency, they are able to obtain a dynamic perception of their position within the realm of productivity. This perception is mainly influenced by three factors: gender, generation and age. Overall, different generations in the colonia Monte Alban, experience child work in diverse ways. The experience of children's work within the household is neither positive nor negative, but tinted by ambiguous ideas about children's own position as domestic contributors and capable beings.

Chapter 6

Dynamics of everyday negotiation: agency and sense of community

6.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to describe and discuss how the children of the colonia negotiate their domestic status not only by participating in daily routines, but by contesting them. The main argument is that familial relationships are as important as other wider socio-cultural elements, as the non-economic factors which influence decision making processes involving work. Within the household, it appears that children's participation, which they negotiate, is a daily-based response to poverty, limited labour in the unskilled market for the adults and the low levels of literacy. Children's attitudes are part of their expected responses to their socialisation. Their influence in decision-making processes is very limited in this respect. In terms of larger influence of society, children's participation in the household survival is the result of a tradition in community work. This allows children to adapt some of the economic mechanisms used in rural societies to their life in the colonia Monte Alban. In this respect, children see themselves as engaged in a more complex web of relationships. These relationships involve their families, relatives and neighbours (expanding with time) for the well being of the community, as a response to the prevalence of cultural tradition. While children's participation making is limited within the household, this appears to be more active in the local community activities and decisions through social networks. In these extended relationships, children have a more dynamic role in participating in decision-making.

There is a link between the parents' and children's generations with respect to the way household work is organised. This link depends on the agrarian background of the parents, which to a certain degree, defines the way children integrate into the colonia and at the same time how they identify to this background. The agrarian legacy of the parents influences the skills and social tools children acquire and develop to pursue their daily productive roles. However, the very same agrarian background is the reason why children express certain ambivalence towards their parents' working

values. Although both generations are more or less aware of these values, the perceptions differ. Children tend to be selective of their parents' agrarian practices, when it comes to adapting them for their own daily activities. The key practice here is the formation and use of social contacts and networks. As these were of paramount importance for their parents, when they migrated to the colonia to find jobs and a new life, nowadays, they are even more important for children that need to access the working networks in Oaxaca City. This does not imply that the way social networks are established is the same between generations. What it is common are the rationale and the importance attributed to them. Hence, children learn from their parents' experiences in this respect, whereas they craft their own networking strategies. The fact that both generations share similar beliefs about the importance of social networks shows continuity between their parents' agrarian life-styles, their migratory experiences and the family's present economic conditions. This continuity is reflected in work patterns as well as social networking, even though the involved generations may perceive themselves differently. Children may regard themselves as non-rural city dwellers, while their parents draw on their agrarian past. However, they are both aware of each other's perceptions towards their identities, which imply that a bridge exists between the two generations, through relationships (James et al. 1998; Mayall 2002). This is reflected by their activities towards establishing social networks.

Following the previous discussion, this chapter evolves around two main topics. The first is about how children have learned of their parents' migratory experiences and the way they compare it to their own present situation. The second is focused on social networks and the impact on children's working experiences and community participation. The means by which these two themes relate to each other is through the understanding of how children learn about their family's past and use it to construct their own social networks and participate in decision making (Baker & Panter Brick 2000).

The above issues will be related to the information gathered during my interviews and personal observations within the household and community milieu. Assuming that children have agency characteristics and are influenced by past actions of their parents and grandparents they are able to elaborate and participate in their restructuring

(Archer 1998: 83). The children's relationships influence the way their social world is constructed and determine their notion of childhood (Jenks 1996; James et al. 1998).

Much can be learned from the responses made by the children when negotiating their position as dependents /helpers/ providers within their relationships with adults. Relationships place them in the position whereby they can interpret their own experiences in conjunction with those of the people with whom they relate. How children construct their own notions of childhood are based on what they learn from their community. These are filtered and reinterpreted by their sense of individuality, and so children negotiate their status when participating in the decision-making processes, through their daily activities, particularly with reference to work. It appears that, by participating in broader relationships, where productivity is a constant inclusive element, they are able, in the short term, to raise their living standards, and to continue a circular process of economic and social reciprocity and solidarity within the family (cf. Goodnow & Warton 1991). However, as it can be seen in the case studies, their own views of childhood may seem pessimistic and undefined when they approach adolescence and adulthood. Their expectations of participating in the wage market are narrowed when material necessity is greater. The socio-economic necessity of maintaining the survival of the household prevails over any individually related choices. It is their involvement in productive activities that gives them a sense of independence which they use to their advantage in relationships with the adults. Economic participation allows them to change their relationships with other people around them. Children's voices are heard more in this situation than when they just act as helpers at home or students at school.

In the light of the argument that children act as agents, but at the same time conform to part of a social structure, I intend to review the process of social change observed in the labour experiences of three generations, where children are involved in building and reproducing their relationships within their parents' and grandparents' work experiences, thus influencing 'the balance between agency and structure in the stream of history' (Archer 1998: 82).

In analysing the contemporary effects of the changes between generations observed in labour experiences, I will explore the importance of relationships that allow children

to participate in reproducing their society. If relationships shape the agential characteristics of working children, it is important to examine the interplay between individuals and society, in particular, how children participate in the organisation of community, and how they relate to different people. So, having said that relationships determine the ways in which children understand their actions, it is important to understand the multiplicity of relationships in which children are involved (Mayall 2002). It is not only family members with whom children establish relationships, but other individuals, thus resulting in the multiplicity of resources available, from which to negotiate their economic and social role in their home. These relationships are expressed in terms of practical and affective liaisons. When referring to their pragmatic characteristics, I consider social networks as relationships providing people with access to sources of income (work jobs, grants, public funding and charity), and other material goods (i.e., construction materials, services, favours). How far social networks provide affective links between individuals, and promote access to material goods, as well as the development of friendship and peer relationships will be explored.

Children who are engaged in social networks also learn from other people past experiences of how to cope with similar events (cf. Mayall 2002). In the course of comparing interviews and observations, I will attempt to demonstrate how gender differences can be very important for influencing children's lives and, therefore, on their ability to support their households economically. The position of girls in general, and boys without their fathers at home, was examined (also reviewed in the previous chapter) in order to see if they are supportive towards their mothers' households' working loads. To illustrate this, I will present accounts of children involved in social networks that are not only sources of income, but also of affective support and understanding of their mothers' situation.

I intend to illustrate how children cope within certain environments that limit or encourage their decision-making processes. The key element in presenting the testimonies is to deduce how children negotiate their status as child/provider and child/dependent on adults. These processes will entail diverse levels of decision-making by children. They undertake a variety of roles simultaneously. Therefore, by exploring how children cross the boundaries of these roles and how they are able to

negotiate their status according to the particular circumstances, it should be possible to understand the influence of society and culture on children's notion of childhood and work, through their own constructs (see also Jenks 1996; James et al. 1998; Lee 2001). In this approach, children are able to negotiate independent, autonomous or detached relationships within the household, that nevertheless affects the household organisation and relationships. Thus, agents and society influence each other within the context of social change.

6.2 Parental immigration and its effects on the inter-generational perception of child work

As stated in chapter 4, the colonia Monte Alban is a marginal settlement on the outskirts of Oaxaca City, where most of the population is of rural origin (inter-municipal migration), and with strong ethnic roots similar to many of the indigenous groups in the state. Such is the case of Jaime an eleven year old boy, the second child of a family of four children. In referring to his relations with his parents' ethnic origin, he expresses the ambiguity he feels towards his roots and his birth place:

I was born in Oaxaca [City], but my mother says I'm also from her village [San Mateo]. She doesn't like it when I say I'm from here, but I'm from here... that is what my birth certificate says... I don't speak the language, and I don't know how to work in the fields. My mother has sent me there about three times and I didn't understand anything of what they say... I didn't like to work in the fields, because it is very tiring... but I played with my cousins and I went for swimming in a very nice river... that is what I like about my mother's village... (Jaime 11).⁸⁴

On the other hand, some children do feel a greater sense of attachment to their family's village, as in the case of Lourdes. Lourdes, a 13 year old girl, works full time as a maid in two different households; she is illiterate and the youngest child of a family of four children. Her mother works also as maid in a house in the city centre, and her father has been unemployed for the last seven years due to medical reasons

⁸⁴ See chart on Jaime. Jaime's father is native to the same village of Jaime's mother. However, because they never married; Jaime learned how his father dishonoured his mother and him. So, he does associate the village with his father's detachment.

(diabetes). They moved from their village, close to Villa Alta, when the oldest daughter was four years old. Lourdes's brothers and sister also work to support their household. Like Lourdes, the siblings have never attended school, nor do they speak their mother's tongue. Lourdes recalls the way she has participated in the *guelaguetza* [returned work]⁸⁵ in her mother's village for their patron's celebration, and where the cooperation of most young and adult women in the food preparations is expected. The exchange of favours is an extensive practice among "indigenous people"⁸⁶, and covers most aspects of daily and ceremonial life. Children are involved in this community practice and, as Lourdes relates, it is an experience that does not only relate her to her mother's cultural background, but to her present relationships for accessing economic goods and services:

On the day of San Juan, I went to my mother's village... All the women were preparing food and tortillas for the guests... Because I was learning to prepare tortillas, my mother asked me to do "guelaguetza" for another woman who had worked in my mother's field for a day... I prepared tortillas for about an hour...I was tired... but content...(Lourdes 13, girl).

Lourdes, in the same interview, mentions how useful it has been for her to know how to do "guelaguetza", when they do not have enough to buy food. She participates in "guelaguetza" activities with other women in the neighbourhood. It is a way to compensate for the lack of cash or work, and at the same time makes the Lourdes feels attached to her family's village.

Overall, most children interviewed relate to a similar attachment that they have to their previous generation's geographical and socio-cultural background (see also Baker 1998). However, children such as Jaime reflect a minority of children who identify themselves as urban-born, thus placing a certain cultural distance from their parents' background. They hold ambivalent views towards their agrarian and

⁸⁵ Guelaguetza is a traditional way of organisation work and mutual cooperation extensively practiced in the whole state. See chapter 2 for a more detailed description.

⁸⁶ "Indigenous people" is a widespread term used in academic and non-academic milieus in Mexico. The term incorporates all those ethnic groups which retain some pre-Hispanic characteristics such as the language and geographical identity. Because the variety of ethnic groups in Mexico is vast, anthropologists in the country have grouped them under a same term, which does not necessarily reflect the diversity and differences of these groups (see Gamio 1942; cf. Del Val 1993)

indigenous background. By living within an urban environment, children's lives have been spent mainly in the colonia and their activities are aimed towards the fulfilment of daily needs. In the countryside, needs are satisfied in a seasonal basis, when work is organised more or less in a similar way year after year.

In juggling their cultural and economic heritage with the present demands of daily life, the children of the colonia experience ambivalent values towards their parents' cultural and economic background. I gathered a series of testimonies about how children understand their family's migration experiences from the rural indigenous communities to the urbanised outskirts of Oaxaca and its economic implications, on this issue. For most children, agrarian work seems rather "backward", "tiring" and rural life is seen as "boring" and limited to a very few amenities. In terms of the values related to agrarian work, they expressed more positive views by saying that it allows people to work in the same place they live, to have "free food", and "that peasants are closer to nature" than people in the cities. Children claim some other favourable benefits of rural life which include having "traditional" festivities, big families and places to enjoy such as rivers, forests or the sea. This search for natural spaces within urban environments is common for young people groups as a way to recreate not only a rural space, but also to extend their relationships to less common daily places (see also Nairn et al. 2003: 20). So, it appears that agrarian work is devalued in the children's eyes, though they value other elements of rural life, such as the landscape, the agricultural fertility rituals⁸⁷ and annual festivities of patron saints, as much as sharing some time with their relatives on the villages.

Regina, an eleven year old girl, was born in the city, but three years ago her family, both parents and her two sisters and herself, moved back to her father's village, due to her father's illness and inability to find a job in the city. They tried to adapt to the rural life by working in the fields. They returned after three months when they realised how difficult was to adjust to a limited income, as well as the difficulties faced by the girls not speaking the language and all living in one small room.

⁸⁷ Agricultural fertility rituals are usually performed the first day the seeds are sown. Most of children are aware of these rituals, which are performed mostly by the males and sometimes by boys who plant the maize seeds. A chicken is offered to the earth to be cultivated. This chicken is later cooked and offered to all the workers participating in the process. These rituals are being lost due to family farms being replaced by commercial plantations. Children learn from the parents the importance of these rural practices and rituals and find them "mysterious" and intriguing.

However, Regina recalls the village in a rather positive way, referring to her fruit gathering trips and festive visits. Of all her family, she was the one who most enjoyed living there.

I have been to my mother's village about three times. I like it because I go to bath in the river and I collect lots of nice fruit... We [usually] go when there is a fiesta and all the families go to visit their parientes [relatives]... (Regina 11, girl).

There is a common notion that in rural life 'there is of plenty of food', even when other material goods are limited. Most adults and children alike, expressed their strong view that in the countryside people never starve, as might happen in the cities where 'everything must be paid for' as some grandparents expressed it (Don Agustin, Doña Silvia, and Doña Concha). Antonia, 11, for instance claims how much she prefers to listen to her grandfather than to play with her cousins whenever she and her family visit their village in the southern mountains.

My grandfather says that in the village nobody dies of hunger like in the cities, because some foods are free, and you have the people of the village to help you if you did not have a good crop... I like it in there, but I'm used to living in Oaxaca, even if the food is not free... (Antonia 11, girl).

Thus, agrarian work is viewed as the opposite to the urban productive activities. Children comprehend that rural life is not exclusively related to manual work from dawn until dusk, but that rural life provides them with a certain sense of identity and belonging, that the city does not always offers them. In adjusting to the limitations of the urban settlement in terms of space, the children find ways to bring the "rural field" to their neighbourhood. As referred to earlier, recreation in rural life involves daily tasks, from cooking in a rudimentary way (i.e., using firewood and *nixtamal*⁸⁸ to prepare tortillas) and also organising recreational weekend trips to the surroundings of the nearby mountains. So, although there is a low regard for agrarian activities *per se*,

⁸⁸ *Nixtamal* is the ground maize boiled in limestone to soften it to make it pliable. It is then reduced to smooth dough, ready to prepare tortillas.

children understand its importance and strive to embrace other elements related to it in a more positive way that is observed by the above accounts above.

Children periodically organise trips to the other side of the “mountain”, referring to the conservation park located in the surroundings of the archaeological site. Luis (boy, 16), Ricardo (boy, 14), Jesus (boy, 15), Felipe (boy, 13), Rosalia (girl, 15) and other younger children referred to their “exploring” trips to find animals, to swim and collect fruits. As Luis noted on one of these excursions when I went with them, “it is like the village of my father”. Children feel disengaged from the agricultural work, but at the same time strive to recover some of the knowledge of the previous generation in leisure activities such as their exploring trips described earlier. On those, I realised what detailed knowledge they have of the landscape, the different types of vegetation and fauna. Older boys also have some experience of hunting with their fathers and spending nights in the *monte* (forest and crop land), looking for hares, small deer and birds:

When I was little, my father took me few times for hunting. We went behind these hills on the other side to Xocotlan. I was about nine. We went to hunt hares. My father said that some years ago there used to be deer as well, but with all the houses being built, the people scared them. He has a rifle that was of his father. They used to go hunting in Villa Alta. He loved hunting when he was a child and says he misses it. We haven't gone for a while because it is becoming dangerous. We could shoot other persons because now everybody goes for camping over there... I wish I could go hunting in Villa Alta. (Ricardo 14, boy).

Older children have more elaborated views about the differences in productive activities between theirs in urban situations and those of their parents' and grandparents' work in the rural villages. As stated by Davis and Ridge (1997: 6), among others, there is a widely held perception of rural life as ideal and trouble free. This notion prevails also among the urban population, particularly those ones with few links to rural life. Thus, older children (10-16 years) recognise a variety of economic reasons for their parents and grandparents to move to Oaxaca City, which are usually poverty and the lack of other job opportunities in the locality. This is

observed by Jose Alberto, 16, who is the third child of a family, who believes his life is now in the city and no longer in the village. Jose Alberto's father now lives in Detroit, USA, most of the time, and sends money back home to his wife and children, while his mother works part time in a hotel as a cleaner. Jose Alberto, in contrast to his sister who works as a seamstress, is currently studying graphic design in a school for the technical professions. He says he would like to be an architect. He studies hard and spends any free time with his friends. His views of the differences between his grandparents, parents and himself show a great awareness of the impact these have in their present life style.

My father says that the land was getting tired and he wanted his children to study and have more opportunities than him... He was very young when he first went to Mexico City. He says there are many nice things there, but he missed San Mateo a lot... My grandparents paid for his bus tickets. They did not have a lot of money, but they said it was good for my father and all the family... My father helped them when he found a job in Oaxaca working with a butcher... he sent some money to San Mateo. He said he missed his village a lot and although the city had more opportunities [to make a living], still he wanted to work in the milpa [corn fields], like everyone else there...but couldn't (Jose Alberto 16, boy).

While Jose Alberto's identity seems detached from his grandparents' rural life, he recognises the importance of his father's transitory move from the agrarian production to a profession in the city, which allowed his grandparents and his own family to survive in both places. Today, as related during one interview, he claims he would never come back to San Mateo to take over peasant work, as his grandparents have suggested in a number of times. Jose Alberto argues that he is not prepared to give up everything he has achieved so far and become a landholder. His goal is set on his future career as an architect. Nevertheless, Jose Alberto expresses the value he holds towards his family cultural and working background, but distances himself from any practical link with the rural village and the possibility of returning there to work. Jose Alberto believes that returning to the village would impair his opportunities for upgrading socially and economically in the city. At the same time he recognises the sacrifices that his father's household made in providing him with the means to move

out from the village. Thus, although there is a loss in his sense of rural identity, Jose Alberto values the support of his grandparents' household gave to his family today.

There is continuity in the patterns of child work: parents worked during their childhoods, nowadays their children also work. The environments have changed, but the ways households are structured in response to the socio-economic demands of the labour market have influenced the need for all household members to contribute (Chant 1991). Moreover, children become active participants, not just because some of them reproduce the activities that their parents or grandparents once performed, or still do, but they also challenge the way some activities are carried out. For instance, peasant work is perceived as distant activity with which they cannot identify. Agricultural work is often regarded by people who have few economic opportunities as the only means of survival. Low literacy and a strong religious identity are some elements that children believe formed their grandparents' working bonds to their villages:

There were not schools in my grandparents' village. They were church goers... there was nothing else to do... and they only knew how to use the plough and there was no much to do [apart from cultivating] (Felipe13, boy).

In their testimonies it is possible to observe how children are participating in a different socio-economic dynamic of production and domestic reproduction, where agrarian life, although aspects of which are still present in many daily activities, has become of secondary importance. Children have distanced themselves from a rural-indigenous environment, and instead conceive themselves as children of the "neighbourhood" the "colonia" as some of the youngsters expressed. Agricultural activities are respected and acknowledged as a source of survival for previous generations, which allowed the children of today to live in the colonia. They understand the importance that the work once had for their families and how this has been completely replaced by more urban-type activities. As mentioned, there is still a sense of preservation of the peasant unity through other cultural elements that accompanied them, such as the festivities and the very organisation of community work that still prevails in the neighbourhood (see chapter 2 for a discussion about *guelaguetza* and *tequio* work). Children perceive peasant work as "backward" and

unchanging, while their expectations are nowadays focused on education and skilled work. Children comprehend that there is little chance for them to “return” or to adopt the peasant lifestyle as main source of income. Although these children neither live in a “city” environment” nor in a peasant one, they associate their future with a more urban-like lifestyle, where employment is more available than in the villages, and where extra-household networks of support take on greater importance.

Colonia children often try to find spaces nearby that resemble the “*monte*” or by looking forward to patron festivities and trying to reproduce this through play with their friends (see James et al. 1998: 87-90 in their discussion about play and culture reproduction). It appears that although children are no longer involved in agrarian activities, there is some continuity between their agrarian heritage and their present lifestyle, which is constantly reproduced through their leisure and domestic activities.

Children think of some of the past economic events of their families as in a way affecting their own present conditions. They say things like “if my grandparents hadn’t given permission to my mother to go to Mexico City... I wouldn’t be living here...” (Antonia, a girl aged 11, talks about her mother’s job in the capital city before she got married). They understand the effect the socio-economic spatial change has had, not only in their parents’ or grandparents’ lives, but also on their own. It is the comprehension of the whole chain of events and relationships that placed them in a “better off” position as compared with previous generations. It links them to the past, giving the children a sense of an identity related to their rural village. Children frame themselves within a wider temporal-spatial experience, where they are not passive, but are active participants in “trying to improve” themselves and their parents’ lives by attending school and helping them out with domestic and paid work. Most children recognise that living close to the city offers them the chance to be employed in a variety of jobs, which the countryside does not offer. Work expectations have changed not only from their grandparents’ experiences, but from that of their own parents. Migrants and their children have to adjust to a more varied urban lifestyle, including basic urban infrastructure, transportation, salaries and fixed working schedules. For children, living in the city offers them a more dynamic set of options, than rural life. Living in the village is seen as a passive, a repetitive way of life. The positive and negative aspects of urban work is viewed in a different light by children,

and where positive and less positive aspects are reflected and understood by children when comparing themselves to the previous generations. The work notion has a different meaning, but still is not separated from its roots. The basic reason for, and expectation of, work is for all household members to contribute in one way or another. Cooperation is an element experienced and valued by all three generations. Acknowledging cooperation helps children to understand their present economic role within the household and sometimes to contest or negotiate their position within it.

Therefore, working family practices have changed in terms of the experience and the values attached to different kinds of work (agrarian opposed to urban work). This can be observed in the way children express their notions not only about work, but about their environment and other related events (e.g., in the fields, or annual festivities). As observed by Mayall (2002: 82-85), children involved in migratory experiences are engaged in socio-cultural transformations. This experience can be twofold, where on the one hand, they are encouraged to preserve and reproduce their cultural heritage and, on the other hand, they are also encouraged to support the demands of the household to adjust to the new socio-economic urban environment. This adjustment means the acquisition of new skills, social abilities, and social codes, which allow them to feel integrated without losing their sense of generational belonging. Similarly, children in the colonia are required to integrate into a social environment that requires them to work for uncertain wages and where the security of the rural village is put aside, while the sense of belonging to it still persists. The indigenous language has been lost in most cases, because for children it is of no use in their present community, through knowledge of community organisation is still present in their minds when referring to work and celebration (see Valiñas 1993).

6.3 Children's relationships and social networks

In order to survive in a society where the welfare system is inadequate or non-existent, migrants have developed other means of economic and social support within the urban setting (Lomnitz 1975; Draibe 1990; Pilotti 1999). In the colonia, the social and economic distance placed between the settlers and the mainstream socio-economic structure means that they are not fully integrated to the main urban society. However, this also has positive aspects since it offers the settlers the opportunity to

strengthen their social links with people in similar socio-economic conditions. The strong social networks in Oaxaca confer a sense of belonging to a socio-cultural environment. Most participants have similar rural and cultural backgrounds, which grant them a sense of trust and support for one another.

One of the most important functions of the social networks is to supply material needs through the exchange of goods and services, which could be met by stable incomes and better structured welfare system (cf. Gonzalez de la Rocha 1993: 332). Another important element is of a more subjective nature. The social networks provide also a familiar environment at the level of the interpersonal relationships, which makes the transition period of adaptation easier for the newcomers. With this support, the colonia settlers appear to have adjusted to an “ad hoc” system that allows them to survive and adapt to the economic limitations, while establishing affective and trusting relationships with others. Due to limited labour skills, settlers, including children, seek to establish social networks which help them to find jobs and solve everyday problems in the neighbourhood, including access to the local school system. Though commonly regarded as “support” for survival strategies (Gonzalez de la Rocha 1993; cf. Goddard & White 1982), my observations show that children’s participation in social networks is not merely limited to supporting the material needs of a poor household. The positive value of children’s network participation is that it gives children a strong sense of responsibility and recognition. Commonly, when networks are established through children, (as in the case of Jaime, who met other people through his current job as a cleaner in a private house), adults and other family members are also able to make use of them. Children express a feeling of being more independent when they establish their own networks. They say to have the chance to find for themselves friends or acquaintances and a chance for future work opportunities. For instance, Remedios, an eleven-year old girl whose family often struggles to survive on her father’s salary as a wall painter, had never worked before but now felt obliged to find work, washing clothes along with her mother for other people in the nearby middle class settlement.

Soledad [NGO worker] told me that if I need to get some money she can introduce me to her family and other people she knows in the centre...It was

my idea to talk to her, but my mother was the one who told her. I wanted to do that on my own, but my mother got there first... (Remedios 11, girl).

Most adults depend on old acquaintances from their former villages to establish networks of support. *Paisanos* [settlers from the same village] and relatives act as the main group of individuals participating in the local social networks. Thus, they get involved in helping each other, i.e., looking after the children, lending and borrowing money, and involving themselves in local politics in order to gain better access to infrastructure and stable jobs within the local bureaucracy (see Murphy & Stepick 1991). Social networks also play the role of allowing people to enter a very competitive labour market where the settlers have rather limited possibilities to entering by their own efforts. Due to their low skill and literacy, the settlers often have to resort to social networks to find jobs within the city, usually within the low-skilled service sector, or to initiate their own businesses by being self-employed. As Mexico is a developing economy, there is a tendency to favour a minimum literacy degree for persons who wish to obtain even simple jobs in the formal sector. For example, cleaners are required to have a minimum of secondary school education, to be employed in companies and large scale businesses such as the National Telecommunications Company (Maria, mother). This explains the *credentialism phenomenon* (Balan 1969; Levine 1983; Brown 2001). *Credentialism* excludes a large proportion of the population with low levels of formal education, while pressurising them to find other ways to obtain the means of employment, hence indirectly reinforcing the use of the social networks.

Being aware of this phenomenon, many children strive to improve their literacy to a minimum degree, which could enable them to gain some position within the formal labour sector. In the meantime, children also participate in a dynamic way to extend their social networks. In economic terms, they participate in two main types of activities: 1) by relieving adults from domestic activities so that adults can extend their household networks (see also Schildkrout 1981), and 2) they perform productive activities which enable them to establish their own social networks or to take advantage of those already existing (Lomnitz 1975). In the first case, children recognise the importance of supporting their mothers' domestic activities, so adult women are free to obtain wage-based jobs. For instance, Irasema a thirteen-year old

girl, whose mother works as cook in a catering kitchen in the city centre, is the oldest daughter of a family of three children, manages to work part time in the market, look after the other two children and to nurse her father when he is very ill. Irasema receives some help from her two younger siblings who share chores on their return from school.

I have to help my mum to look after the house and my sisters, so she can work....My father doesn't always have a job, but my mother has one... so she relies on me and my little sisters to cook and do chores... not so much on my father [as she relies on me] because he is ill and we have to take care of him as well... (Irasema, 13).

Another case, that of Rosalia, a girl aged 15, demonstrates how children become active participants of the local social networks and can obtain employment through them. In fact, most of the working children with paid job experience have obtained their jobs from third persons. These are usually former employers of their parents, or neighbours with long term jobs or stable positions, and often relatives who settled in the city before their families moved:

My mother found me the job through her "comadre" [fictive co-mother]⁸⁹. She worked for her many years and trusted her. She wanted somebody trust worthy and she thought of my mother. But because my mother had already a lot of work with other "patronas" [women employers] , my mother's 'comadre' thought of me... that was very good because it is not easy to find jobs for yourself and you need a contact like her (Rosalia 15, girl).

Children learn the importance of "knowing people" when they need short-term jobs. Older children with some paid work experience were keen to talk about the people

⁸⁹ *Compadrazgo* or fictive parenthood is a widespread custom among Mexican Catholics and it involves the spiritual and moral support of a godchild when he/her is baptised. Godparents take affective responsibility from the day they present the child to the church. Ideally, they are expected to offer emotional and material support in the absence of the biological parents due to death, illness or poverty. As observed in my own interviews, this expected support often is not always offered, but the actual terms in the relationships persist. The link of *compadrazgo* is extended to other minor ceremonies (i.e., *compadres* of school graduation, *compadres* of house blessing, *compadres* of wedding dress, *compadres* of the Nativity, among other titles) (cf. Lomnitz 1975).

with whom they work and feel at ease so as to be friends with or to ask for small favours:

The teacher's [my employer's] brothers are teaching me how to fix cars... They invite me to drink coca-colas and they told me that if I help them more when I learn some more things [as mechanic apprentice], they can invite me again and pay me a bit more than now... Sometimes I wash their cars and I get 20 pesos and they usually invite me later to watch T.V and have lunch (Jaime 11, boy).

According to Lee (2001), children's agential characteristics do not act against convention, or independently of the cultural background of people in a particular society. On the contrary, an agent uses conventional relationships to create a dependable "network of extensions" (ibid. 129). Children then do not act on their own account, but as a consequence of a network of events, conventions and relationships, hence the "dependency" to which Lee refers. What is important to note is how children use social conventions to create spaces and opportunities that places them beyond the control of the household and at the same time participate in the family's social networks. When children act on their own account they are, at the same time. Reproducing their community's social structure, but as Lee points out, conventions are always open to change (ibid. 133). Children demonstrate not only their determination to act in their own interest and that of their families, but also they express a deep knowledge of how their society is constituted. Therefore, the children develop a strong sense of responsibility, identity, belongingness, and most importantly, creativity (Archer 1998: 83; James et al. 1998: 89).

6.3.1 Peer relationships and friendship

In observing social networks it is possible to discover the complexity and variety of the peer relationships in which the children engage, and how it extends to the occupational adult sphere. Solidarity with other children, who have longer working experience of places and trades, allows less experienced children to be introduced to a "new" working environment. For example Luis, a boy aged 16, who started working as packer in a supermarket, learned from other children and adults about the

environment and his co-workers who had working there for some time. It was through a friend of his from the colonia that Luis got his job by replacing a boy who had abandoned the position. Thanks to this friend, Luis also learned about the specifications and rules of the job. Some months later, Luis also helped his friend from the colonia, Ricardo another boy (14 years) to find a similar job there. Before Luis left to continue his secondary school education, he contacted a cousin leaving in San Juanito, to take his position:

[When I was working] I had been out of school for more that a year. I missed it because I really liked it...I was a bit confused because my parents had separated... My job was fine, but I wanted to finish my education...One of my cousins, Mario, had been asking me about work opportunities in the supermarket in which I was working...So, I recommended him to take my place when I left... Mario was very happy and took it. Afterwards he invited me to go for some memelas [local delicacies] to the market as a thank you for the favour. We are cousins, but also good friends... (Luis 16, boy).

It is by working with people of different ages and status that is possible to observe how work does not only entail a mere economic activity, but is also the expression of children's own views and understandings developed through their relationships with others (see James et al. 1998). Relationships among Monte Alban children extend to a diversity of individuals and places that are not necessarily confined to children. Adult relatives, neighbours and employers are regarded as sources of cordial relationships, and some even as friends. Children are not only able to talk about their daily experiences at home, at school and at work with their friends, but to listen and "learn" from them. As Ramon, an adult man, refers to his experience of working in the city after moving from his village:

At first I worked alone, but I was not selling anything. One day I met Braulio, who was of my same age and was selling sweets and cigarettes. He had been working two years more than me, and knew where to go and how to approach people. He taught me to do the same, and because I was selling t-shirts, I was not competing with his job...so I met other children and we would all go and sell in groups our

merchandise. Sometimes I was alone, but sometimes I went with them and it was easier to approach customers, it was less boring and easier to work with people you knew...(Ramon 24, man).

Unlike adult-child relationships, peer relationships are based not only on the benefits obtained from such social networks, but in returning them as friendship and solidarity (James 1993). In Ramon's understanding his inexperience when working on the streets was overcome when meeting with other children, which allowed him to establish new relationships, and therefore, to learn from other children's experiences. A similar relationship formed by children working in groups has also been observed in urban areas of Russia as was reported in a survey conducted by Mansurov (2001). He found that children between 12 and 15 years of age prefer to work in groups, because they feel safer and protected from potential troubles, i.e., with racketeers. In this sense, work is not just related to the mere activity of obtaining an income, but to the creation and recreation of relationships and the expression their agential characteristics. Their decision to work with friends and to share experiences, tricks and games, implies that work is not an alienating activity. It entails meaningful positive aspects.

Children feel more at ease when working alongside other children. They do not feel threatened, or as pressurised as adults do when learning new activities. Authority and control are then put on hold, and although some sort of power or leadership may develop, children are able to either negotiate these relationships or to simply abandon them (see also Thorne 1993; James et al. 1998). This was the case with Rodrigo, a 10 year old boy who works in the streets shining shoes, who told me how he fought with another boy who used to bully him about his old shoes. Rodrigo one day tired of listening to his jokes kicked him on one leg and stopped talking to him for a while. However, some time after, the two children renewed their relationship without any significant frictions. Ramon (24, man), also went through a similar experience with a boy who claimed to be "more macho" than the rest of the group of five friends, and constantly challenged them. Ramon, predicting some danger in his actions, convinced the rest of his friends to keep away from the boy, who did not bother them again and went to harass another group (see also Thorne 1993 about boys' hierarchy).

6.4 Ambivalent forms of social networks

Peer relationships which are related to paid work, which sometimes overlap with social networks, have a great impact on relieving children from other less regarded activities and relationships. On a negative-positive scale, children regard as negative relationships those that affect their health and that prevent them from doing “good things” such as studying or playing (Ennew 1989). In this sense, drug consumption, individual and gang vagrancy are seen by children as having a negative effect on children, by preventing them from consolidating “good” friendships. I met some older children (Luis, 16 and Felix, 17 both boys) who were involved in “gang” activities. The gang was known as the “Zeros” [taken from the number “zero”], consisted mainly of older children (12 to 17 years of age) who usually gather in specific places (a solitary plot near the school) to recall their experiences in the United States. Among Mexicans they are better known as “*pochos*”, a pejorative term referring to Mexicans returned from the United States. These returning immigrants have some knowledge of the language and the culture of the United States, which they demonstrate as their distinctive emblem. Actually in the gang only one of the leaders, whom I met just once, had been in the States for a couple of months where he picked up some basic vocabulary, particularly that related to the urban gangs.⁹⁰

One element that characterizes the gang, is to “show off” (said by Luis’s non-addict friends) to people in the neighborhood how distinctive they are in terms of their appearance and their activities. They have a bad reputation among the settlers of being drug-users. I did not involve myself with the group. However, I learned that Luis was once member of this gang, and although he stated in one of the interviews that he never consumed drugs, one of his friends found him on a few occasions ‘drugged’, (an event I could not confirm). The fact is that somehow he managed to disentangle himself from the gang thanks to his old (at home) and new (from his job) friends. While involved with the gang, Luis was hired in the nearby supermarket as bag packer. By relating to people in his new job, he managed to break his relationship

⁹⁰ Their aphorism was as “*pochos*” by retaining and reproducing some Mexico-American cultural characteristics [Chicano culture] involving street activities, including the use of drugs. Among the drug activities were sniffing glue, and smoking cannabis. The appearance of the youths contrasted with the rest of the youngsters in the colonia: hipster wide leg trousers, loose shirts, baseball caps, long chains as key holders, piercing, and particularly the use of the language in a mixture of very basic English and Spanish languages.

with the gang, to gain new friends in his job and regain old ones in the colonia. Felix also abandoned, temporarily, the gang to work as a clerk in an uncle's workshop, only to return when he became a drug addict. Nowadays he spends most of his time in the streets, alone and stigmatized by the people in the neighbourhood.

6.4.1 Family conflict as source of expanding social networks

In a less negative sense, peer relationships and social networks also relieve children from performing their domestic work, and can ease tension or conflict generated by their household members. Relationships based on domestic activities encourage not only cooperation, but also can create conflicts among them. So, although in general terms these are regarded as positive, the differences aroused by daily interaction can result in conflict and some sort of aggression towards younger or weaker members. As studied before in Mexico (Chant 1991: 216), domestic conflicts do not just involve adults. Children in nuclear arrangements tend to reproduce and interpret the adult-adult and adult-child authoritarian relationships, which in some cases results in conflict. As I observed, especially in age and gender differentiated relationships, there is a tendency to reproduce patronising attitudes to what children consider weak and docile members of the family, in particular girls.

Male children are said to be educated to command their future households, and so at the present time are privileged to organise other people's activities, especially those of female siblings, and in some cases even their mothers. Girls tend to be subservient to their older and younger brothers, which does not always result in harmonious relationships, but disruptive attitudes as shown in adult-parents' relationships (see chapter 5). This is an effect of the limitations of space and amenities that household members can access, which leaves them with just each other to play with or fight. In such a context, children prefer to spend their time outdoors either playing or doing jobs on their own account, which also gives them time to socialise with other people in the neighbourhood, children and adults alike (see Barnes & Kehily 2003). While boys resort to playing outdoors in distant places from the house, girls find other ways to cope with conflict by chatting to and "helping" with their friends and neighbours' domestic chores (for a small 'tip', as children call it) nearer home. Girls, in such a case, seem to be less favoured by the domestic relationships. Boys are valued and

encouraged to become dominant in decision-making processes, as in the case of Felipe (13, boy), and even at young age, as in the case of Damian (16, boy). This seems to be a pattern observed in other cultures (Bekombo 1981; Goodnow 1988; Leonard 1998).

The significance of gender relationship differences is observed in how children create links to deal with the outside world in a creative way, at the same time they reproduce some of the most valuable relationships in the community, such as cooperation. Social networks belong to this kind of extended relationships involving community members. In the social networks, children take active part in consolidating their own existence as members of it, and as representatives of their households. In this sense, girls occupy a prominent role, which they do not always have in their households. So, friendships and their networks allow them to find other kind of activities that might not necessarily be exclusively for entertainment, but also productive. Carolina has a constant conflictive relationship with her older brother Felipe, and also has to bear the patronising attitude shown by the youngest brother (6 years old), with which she is not always able to deal. Therefore, Carolina resorts to offering herself as a maid in her neighbour's home. It is possible to observe how Carolina values her non-family relationships as a means of relieving her from domestic conflict and boredom.

Felipe shouts at me when my parents are not around... He likes to behave as my father. Cesar copies him and also shouts at me... Felipe calls me lazy and sometimes he beats me up... I usually leave and go to Lolita's [her adult neighbour]. Sometimes I just go and chat with her and her mother, but sometimes I help them with their chores and they pay some money instead...(Carolina 11, girl).

Friend and peer relationships are essential for the children's daily understanding of their immediate world. The significant acquaintances, however, are not necessarily other children, but often adults of the same gender, as observed earlier. While domestic conflict can displace children from their own household, children in an attempt to cope with the situation extend their own social networks. In another interview with Carolina, I questioned her motives for working in the neighbourhood. Apparently, economic necessity is the main reason for her to offer her services, but

delving deeper it was possible to understand that her work brings her other kinds of relationships that allow her to express herself as an individual. So, it becomes clear that conflict at home does not necessarily generate negative effects on children's development of relationships, but can have a positive outcome that does not only benefit them, but also the household relationships. Alliances between members of the same gender generate an extended economic participation beyond the household boundaries, as it appears in Carolina's account:

Although we need some extra money, my father thinks it would be better if I stayed at home. He says that if I work, people will believe that he is lazy and cannot provide for his family, and has to send his children to work... I tell him I'm going to play... But I go to help my godmother instead... He says nothing if I tell him that I'm going out to play. Anyway, sometimes I get bored at home and sometimes Felipe and Cesar don't want me to play with them... I ask my mother's permission, without my father knowing and I go to clean and wash dishes at Lola's. I like to go there because I chat with her or to my godmother, and they give me sweets or fresh juice, and even sometimes they invite me to eat a taco. It is quehacer [domestic work], but at least I can talk to other people... (Carolina 11, girl).

At the same interview with Carolina about her work in neighbours' houses and other places, some aspects escaped me at the time, but later I realized the importance of these kind of relationships that entail not only the performance of children's jobs, but also that they allow 'amicable' relationships between children and adults:

I talk to Lola about my problems. She listens to me and gives me some advice... I tell her about Felipe who bullies me all the time and makes me cry when I don't do what he wants me to...or about my [girl] friends at school or the problems we have at home with my dad...he drinks too much, and my mother gets very upset...Lolita, and sometimes doña Maria listen to me and make feel better. I'm a bit shy with doña Maria because she sometimes scolds me, but I know she means well... (Carolina 11, girl).

In the account of Carolina, it is possible to see how girls maintain, as well as boys do, social relationships, not only with children through play, but also through work. Children such as her, relate to the society by using their own social resources to do so, i.e., communication, personality and eagerness to cooperate. In the case of the children of Monte Alban, they occupy an active role in everyday decision making processes within the household and the community. This does not imply that children live in a democratic, conflict-less society, but in one that has the values and tradition of the whole community, though that does not disregard changes and any influences from other cultures. In this interplay between continuation and change, children are able to use their own means to resolve social and family seeming contradictions. Play becomes their resource for accessing social spaces that would otherwise be unobtainable in a work situation. Even though Carolina knows the meaning and value of “work”, she also knows that work is not a negative activity. In her experience, work does not only entail the payment for her service, but also the way it strengthens her relationships with adults, while providing her with some control over her own activities, beyond her household boundaries.

In contrast to the division of work/play or work/education or public/private dichotomies that prevail in the less developed countries, it appears that in the colonia this separation is not as radical, essential or valued as it is for Euro-American societies (James 1983; James et al. 1998; Mayall 2002; Lee 2001: 52). It emerges that in the colonia, children’s interactions with adults are less restricted and conventional than those in Europe or the United States. Children count on friends of the same age, but also teenagers and adults for social interactions and emotional support. As noted in the discussion about social networks, their friendships are not only present and valued in well located relationships, but are interlinked at different levels where adults and children participate in daily life’s activities. They not only ensure their survival, but also guarantee their community’s cohesion and at the same time children endeavour to cope with technological change and the pressures for achieving socio-economic mobility. As pointed out by James (1998), children’s actions in cross-cultural research reports, show that children are not necessarily perceived as a different group from that of adults. Children in non-Western societies might be regarded as part of the whole society, where prejudice does not exist in the same way, and where they participate

actively in the reproduction of their world, which contradicts the notions of a universal childhood (Jenks 1997; James et al. 1998; Davis 1998).

6.5 Conclusions

In this chapter I have discussed the various issues related to the questions about how children negotiate their domestic roles and express their agency in decision-making processes are discussed. These involve the household and the community milieus. It has been said that children are part of two types of responses to their material limitations in participating in household survival. Both are closely related and assist to understand how children are not only involved to everyday efforts to survive, and as part of their socialisation, but also to contribute to the long term existence of a way of life in their community, through the relationships they establish and that some how they are able to influence. The main points presented in this chapter can be summarised as follows.

Investigating the relationship that exists between children and their parents' rural background in contrast to their urban lives, it was observed that although children are well aware of the socio-cultural and economic background of their parents, the children felt that their parents belonged to a 'different world' (i.e., a rural one, whereas they identified themselves as 'urban'). Some children expressed their eagerness to talk about their parents' villages in terms of what they like and dislike, and possible economic advantages and disadvantages of living in a rural context. Some others, such as Jaime, have more ambiguous ideas, which could be the result of his father's early death and him breaking contact with his father's village. The other children seemed to perceive that there are some practical aspects of rural life that are adaptable to their present condition in the colonia. Older children were able to perceive how their past somehow has influenced their present lives. In understanding migration, it is possible to observe a rupture between generations. The negative aspects, as poverty and limited amenities are seen as obstacles, whereas the landscape and the annual festivities are highly regarded by the children. Their awareness about these differences allow children to contrast their own experience to their parents' ones in terms of work. This, at the same time gives them the opportunity to negotiate their

position within the household as they appear to be more knowledgeable about urban working places and people, than their parents are.

The second theme is related to the previous one, in that it displays the positive aspects inherited from their children's parents' villages' lifestyle, in terms of social relationships. Cooperation at home and within the community is twofold, as a response to the limiting economic opportunities, and as an expression of identity. In the latter aspect the discussion on social networks and peer relationships appear significant for children by strengthening domestic relationships and those of the community. It was observed that children evolved social networks which used to their own advantage. The significance of this is that children, although having the adults as an example, usually act on their own initiative. In this respect, they seem to be more autonomous than in their own domestic sphere. So, although this autonomy can be used for the wellbeing of their own households, it is also an expression of their agency and ability to find, establish and negotiate their work on their own behalf (James et al. 1998; Solberg 1997). The social networks formed by both adults and children were observed to be essential for maintaining their wellbeing. Not only were they activated in job search and finding economic assistance, when failures occurred in household maintenance, but also in the case of overburdened girls, as the means to offer moral support.

The third theme focused on peer relationships and friendships. Within both of these, there are clear elements that children identify as beneficial for them. Whereas in the social networks children participate in a complex series of child-adult relationships, peer relationships and friendships also involve adults and other children, which provide them with a sense of emotional attachment and solidarity. Children are capable of establishing emotional relationships with other children and adults alike. Adult understanding of some aspects of life is usually valued by children. Likewise, some adults, particularly adult women, seem to have closer relationships with children in personal matters. This strengthens their sense of belonging. But, while child to child relationships seem to be based on trust and solidarity, adult to child relationships are mainly based on experience and support.

The last issue discussed was about the ambiguous and conflictive relationships established by the children which had negative characteristics. Gang relationships in the colonia seem to prevail as a hostile response to poverty and dysfunctional households. Children with fathers in the United States, whom have visited temporally, find gang behaviour a way to challenge traditional relationships and at the same time relate to a life style that enhances individual personality features, such as distinctive appearance and prestige. In this sense, although these children establish peer groups, these are not welcome within the more traditional community organisation, because of the drug consumption. In terms of conflicts, children solve them by resorting to emotional support, or to their own established networks, which offers them the opportunity to work and obtain some money. So, conflicts have negative and positive outcomes in the way children tackle them, comprehend and solve them.

It appears that is socially expected for children to fulfil domestic roles, based on gender and age. This is perceived as a natural process to learn cooperation and responsibility. This role participation is taken for granted by adults, from the domestic point of view. After all, parents and grandparents participated in their own household reproduction in order to survive. However, children tend to question the levels of responsibility and cooperation reinterpreting these roles according to their own generation values. These expressions are observed in their external relationships, that children do not take for granted. Although they are part of their traditional community relationships, they are also able to adapt them to their own abilities and resources, making possible the continued existence of the social relationships and their lifestyle in their community.

To conclude, it is expected in the colonia Monte Alban that children have to assist in the running of their household by performing domestic tasks and looking after younger siblings, in order to allow their mothers to seek essential paid work outside. The largest burden is undertaken by girls, as boys tend to be in more privileged position and are encouraged to display 'macho' tendencies at a very young age. The girls' burden is somewhat relieved by them being able to establish their own social networks which provide financial and moral support. The children, both boys and girls accept that they should provide financial support for their households. In this they appear resourceful. The major problem with working is that it comes into conflict

with their education, which is seen by most, but not all, as the only way of securing social mobility and a 'safe future'.

Chapter 7

Beyond household work: negotiating children's working status on the streets and other public places

7. Introduction

In the introduction of this thesis I provided a discussion of the visibility of children working outside the home as public opposed to the invisibility of domestic work confined to the private sphere (Green 1998; Salazar 1998; Levison 2000). There are not specific, definitive places or official regulation about where children can work and so establish their daily relationships. They move between spaces and statuses which allow them more or less a certain degree of action, autonomy and control (see McNamee 2000; Punch 2000). These dimensions are related to the context where they participate and contest their statuses: in the household, the school, the colonia, and the playgrounds. This chapter will focus on public spaces and the way children manipulate, interpret and develop their own relationships through working experiences within the public sphere.

Children involved in paid work in urban Oaxaca seem to spend a significant portion of their lives working in public spaces, as it is for many other children in cities of the developing world (Kenny 1997; Baker 1998; Invernizzi 2003; Bey 2003). In Oaxaca City, children can be seen roaming the streets of the city selling merchandise of all kinds, playing in the central parks, entertaining their little siblings, running-errands for shops, cleaning building façades and begging. Most of these children tend to participate in many productive activities in a single day: they attend the afternoon-shift at school, return home and participate in domestic and community activities.

In contrast to their counterparts working only in domestic milieus, either in their own household or as paid services, children working beyond the household boundaries tend to have a different idea about 'control', 'space' and, most important, 'relationships' (James 1998: 38; Punch 2000; McNamee 2000; Nairn et al. 2003). Although these notions are also shaped by gender, age and generation differences, children working beyond the household appear to have a broader spectrum of

'escaping' the constraints placed by adults and their society (Punch 2000). So, working in non-domestic environments, open and closed spaces (e.g., the street, the market), the city and the colonia, have multiple meanings attached to them. Children tend to be more visible in working in public spaces, making this visibility significant to children's own experiences as they relate to a wide range of people, from the authorities, to customers and other fellow workers. They have greater autonomy when working away from parental supervision, so making their work not only economically productive, but subjectively meaningful in reconstructing their working experiences. Thus, it is understood that relationships, are not merely productive and solely a matter of survival. Relationships are also affective, creative and emotional, where children conciliate productivity with their own sense of control over their time and activities (McNamee 2000; Punch 2000).

In Oaxaca City and the colonia, people relating to children such as employers and tourists (e.g., customers in the *Zócalo*) have their own views about child labour. In this view, children appear as victims of the poverty of their families, out of the control of society, in a disadvantaged position with respect to non-working middle class children within the dominant Western idea of childhood (Zornado 2001; Larson 2004: 375). For children in paid work, the employers or customers appeared to have an authoritarian position as much as their parents and teachers, and so have some influence in shaping some of children's attitudes towards work and family life (Ritala-Koskinen 1994: 326). Employers and customers do seem to view children from a certain position of patronage, which may limit the children's value of their own work and their own self-esteem (Nieuwenhuys 1994: 23).

However, as Punch (2000) points out when observing Bolivian children in a poor rural community, these, as many other children around the world, adapt ways to break the boundaries imposed by adults:

The work of young children tends to be perceived negatively as a burden for the child, yet [...] it has been shown how children fuse the boundaries of work and pleasure, as well as counter the time and space boundaries imposed by adults (Punch 2000: 58).

According to Punch (2000), children's worlds in a poor rural community are structured by the time they spend between work and play; work seen by adults as preferable to play, whereas children tend to prefer play (Barnes & Kehily 2003). In my own observations I found that their time and space is not organised exclusively in this strict order: children engage in other activities besides work and play, such as socialising with adults, chatting and just as James (1983) points out "doing nothing". In this sense, it can be said that although children's work examined in this thesis shares common elements, the relationships upon which work is based vary. Individual experiences might differ and be valued, and thus be more relevant to children themselves than to adults (see also Grint 1991: 200).

In this sense, children are constantly challenging predominant ideas about childhood by looking for ways to escape adult control, while recreating their own spaces and relationships, based not only on pure economic interest, but leisure, affection and knowledge. Children enact their own individuality while recreating their idea of belonging to diverse spaces and relationships and thus interpreting and participating in their own environment and constructing their own notions of work and childhood (Nieuwenhuys 1994; Punch 2000; Mayall 2003).

In this chapter, I propose to examine how children build up their relationships in public places and how gender differences influence the ways they relate to their immediate society. In this sense, the aim is to reveal how children contest the order they are subjected to when working outside the household, and how they participate in the way their immediate world is constructed, which might not replicate the established gender differences within the social normative structure. The research findings are presented in two sections. In order to provide a better insight for my analysis, there are some sample cases presented throughout the sections. The first section, (7.1), examines the issues about children working in public places and the ways in which boys' and girls' diverse strategies help them to cope and negotiate gendered spaces and the limitations due to age and working status. The study cases are centred on boys working in the streets and girls selling goods in a city market. In the second section of the chapter, the analysis will be focused on how children are able to participate actively in transforming their local society. It is structured to expose how the work of children is not meaningful only to the household as an

economic asset, but also as a social asset. Work is also a means to obtain prestige in public domain.

By bringing together specific scenarios and the testimonies of the actors involved, it is possible to shed some light on understanding the interplay between structure and agency in time and space (Archer 1995: 1998). This also allows me to grasp the continuity and transformation in the interpretations of work over a span of three generations. The link seen between agency and structure makes it possible to draw from the children's relations in some situations and to understand children's agency when constructing the daily experience of work.

7.1. Conceptualising visible work from adults' and children's point of views

"Learning by doing" is necessarily an essential socialising factor for children engaging in paid and domestic activities, but not the most important one (see also Nieuwenhuys 1994; Salazar 1998). This does not necessarily coincide with adult's views and some of the children notions of work (see Reynolds 1991: 66). According to the parents interviewed, children learning responsibility from the adults is also important for them to have a complete idea of how to deal with the world of work and to become able attend to their present and future family commitments (Punch 2001). Adults tend to apply an educational and practical value to children's work, whereas children see work from another perspective, an ambivalent one. Within this position children consider their own work as conferring them with a sense of belonging and responsibility, and at times one of burden or as not having value at all.

In Oaxaca, parents claim that due to the low status of children, they cannot obtain good working conditions and benefits: *'My son is only a assistant in a carpenter's workshop...he's learning some skills, so he was told he cannot receive the same payment as the master or a proper assistant...He's very young and needs some experience to be a good carpenter...'* (Yolanda, mother). As is widespread in child work environments, children's wages are conceived by some adults as pocket money, particularly by employers, despite the fact that their jobs are in a structured organisation by having fixed time tables, subordination and obedience and the money is requested by parents (Boyden & Holden 1991: 122; Mizen et al. 2001: 37).

Ultimately, these notions of work for pocket money contradict with what the children themselves claim. Some of them state that the effort of commuting from their homes to the working place merits its recognition; though they agree with the idea that their work is not a proper job.

In reality, the children have their own ideas entailing non-economic values of working. The apparent lack of organisation, the insecurity of their activities and sometimes the inconsistent controlling authority (between paternalism and authoritarianism), allows children to have a degree of latitude when working, to attempt to fulfil some of their households' needs (Niuwenhuys 1997; Baker 1998; Punch 2000). Though, disadvantageous when compared to adults working in the formal sector, children who work utilise their knowledge about society, and their own working experience, in order to cope with everyday life when working outside the household. They use their own ideas by utilizing creative ways of interpreting and performing work (James et al. 1998). Their relationships reflect their place both as individuals and as part of their society. Relationships are the means for their everyday existence (Strathern 1988). These are, however, not the sole factor. Generation differences as much as sociocultural values play an essential role in conditioning in some way the character of children's attitudes towards work (Balagopalan 2002: 30; Mayall 2002: 41). The argument is then, that children are actively participating in shaping their identities as workers (James & Prout 1998; Baker 1998), and therefore constituting themselves as social beings, rather than as social 'becomings'.

7.2 Working in the streets: boys negotiating space

In Oaxaca City, children working in the streets and other public places are always more mobile than children in the market, or children performing domestic work. In these places, young people are able to take control of their activities, i.e., taking breaks and playing while attempting to attract customers (see also Punch 2000; McNamee 2000). A certain degree of autonomy is observed, but not independency, because these children have families and they return everyday to their homes.⁹¹

⁹¹ Occasionally, some children work for shop owners by selling small crafts, running errands or serving as waiters. In such cases, children also receive what owners consider tips or pocket money, which is paid according to the activities performed and time spend. Children in these cases are not considered as part of a labour environment, but as occasional assistants.

As I observed, despite the competition being great for sellers and other people offering services, children can always find places to work. For instance, one of the big problems young shoe-shiners face, on a daily basis, is to compete with older and adult shoe-shiners for better spots in the city. Most of the adult shoe-shiners acquire their own permanent “chair” where they keep their tools of the trade. These more experienced adult shoe-shiners have licenses from the municipality and are distinguished by wearing uniforms. Children of the colonia working in the city centre work without permission and often are under police surveillance. Children claim that police sometimes blackmail them or beat them up (Antonio 9, boy). However, their mobility and charisma allows them to have as many customers as the adult shoe shiners. They resort to a “performance” to convince customers to let them shine their shoes. They walk along the corridors where coffee shops, restaurants and other tourist attractions are to be found. These child shoe-shiners attend school in the afternoons for during mornings and weekends they work in the city centre (*Zócalo, Alameda, Santo Domingo and the Markets Benito Juarez and 20 de Noviembre*). In terms of safety during work, children feel more secure in the city than in their own neighbourhood. The major threat is the police who tend to confiscate the earnings and to harass them. Police and adult shoe-shiner threats are exceptional and tend to occur when there is more competition for customers during off-season. Adult shoe-shiners do not have a single view on young shoe-shiners, some adults identify with them, whereas others see them as a threat to own their livelihood occupations.

Selling sweets and cigarettes is another activity with similar characteristics to shoe-shining. However colonia Monte Alban young sellers compete with children from other *colonias* (most of them are recent indigenous newcomers from the *Triqui* area who are not easily introduced to the mobile market of products and services in this central area). Nevertheless, these children are easily adapted to long hours roaming the streets of the city to seek customers (see also Ortiz Nahón 1999: 79). There is a lot of competition for spaces between adults and children but, nevertheless, young sellers “manage to do their job”. Usually they use their personal connections which allow them to negotiate opportunities when working in groups of four or five, often begging to have their merchandise bought. As mentioned earlier, groups are generally formed by young boys (between the ages of nine and 12). Older boys (13 to 16 year olds) also work in groups, but they tend to distribute their customers more equally, sharing them

if the day is bad. Children that share the same neighbourhood or the same school class are more likely to belong to the same group of friends working in the streets. In this way they extend their social networks from the place of residence or school to the work environment.

An internal division exists for the type of work and area of residence, and in the case of recent immigrants, related to their region of origin. Usually the first generation immigrants are handicraft sellers, occupying strategic posts in the Alameda and sell their products cheaper than in the souvenir shops (see also Song 2001). These sellers live in a colonia located to the north east, about one mile and a half from Santo Domingo Church (El Fortin). While the adults sell in specific places, the children are sent to any available space to sell small crafts made by them. They are bilingual and often resort to begging to obtain some coins if they cannot sell their products [*regalar un peso*]. The young shoe-shiners belong mainly to the Colonia Monte Alban and San Juanito, though some of the adults live in other shanty towns or colonias⁹². Children of these two colonias, usually reproduce some of the activities their parents used to perform during their own childhood, when they first arrived to the city. Shoe-shiners' families, for instance, have at least two generations of men who have participated in the same activity:

I started working when I was eight with my father for one or two days until he let me do it on my own. I didn't like the first days. Afterwards I met many friends and enemies who didn't like the boleteritos⁹³ from the Monte Alban. I got married two years ago and I'm still doing the same job because my parents couldn't pay for my school. I know how to write and read, but you know that this is not enough to find a better job so I wouldn't have to carry heavy packs in the market like my other mates in the colonia. I'd better work here and do my other job as a gardener... (Juan 25, man).

The parents usually “retire” or switch jobs, though some continue in the same trade. Fathers consider this a “very good” first job experience for their male children. They

⁹² 6 Shoe shiners from the colonia were interviewed between the ages of 10 and 14. The interviews in their working place were mostly semi-structured due to their own sense of time. Some were made while they played and work, and some while they rested.

⁹³ *Boleritos*, literally means “little shoe shiners”.

say that it helps them to “form character” and to learn how to deal with hostilities such as the police, the inspectors and the shop owners.

According to their parents, they would prefer their children to be at school and not to work at all. However, they see their children’s work as having a double purpose: to help to support their households, and to learn to provide for themselves later. Autonomy in this sense is encouraged, because is believed it will benefit the household in the long term: “*If Jaime continues studying, his brothers will copy him and we will be better off...no more odd jobs for our family [in the future]...*” (Jacinta, mother). Parents are aware of the risks children take by working on the streets as mentioned above. So, their worlds are not so different from that of their parents as it appears at fist glance as parents have experienced the same occupations when migrating at early age from their villages to the city. Continuity between generations is seen in some families. However, some circumstances and economic changes have taken place (e.g., generational), has influenced by the way contemporary societies perceive children in general (Ennew 1994).

Some colonia children have diverse experiences to those of their parents. First of all, most children of the colonia working in the streets were born in the city, whereas the parents were not. So, they know the language, which is a great advantage to their trades. Also, the ways the city has expanded by “pushing the poor towards the hillsides” (Poniatowska 2000), marks big differences between people working in the streets and the children working exclusively in domestic contexts. Children in the streets are able to adapt the spaces to their needs and to deal with an imposed urban order (McNamee 2000). They de-codify or interpret the order of city spaces and the meanings these entail (James et al. 1998: 37-58). They are aware of the forbidden places, the leisure spaces, the places to hide, even places to rest and sleep which are unknown to many of their own friends and neighbours in the colonia. So three aspects of children working in the streets unfold: 1) They act with certain autonomy from their parents’ and other adults’ control; 2) they identify their own spaces and make them of their own; and 3) they regulate their own time scale (i.e., between work and play), as the following excerpts show:

Sometimes, when the day is nice and we've worked hard, some of us go to the Canteras park. It is beautiful and we can play basketball and sometimes football. I like basketball the most. Later we buy tortas [sandwiches] and have a sorbet... ...I like to go alone as well, but I prefer to be with my friends (Rodrigo 10, boy).

In another occasion, Rodrigo referred again to how is possible for him and his friends to have some moments of leisure when working:

If is Sunday and there is a fair, Raul brings his guitar and we sing. Lorenzo is very shy, he doesn't sing in public, but Raul, Gonzalo and I do....We play all kinds of songs... and one day some people gave us money...It was just playing and we were given some coins. Nice! (Rodrigo 10, boy).

Antagonisms may develop with adults, particularly with those ones engaged in the same activities as the children:

Those ones who have their "chairs" are the worst [adult shoe-shiners]. They run after us or call the police to beat us and throw us out from the Zócalo and La Alameda, but we run faster than them. Sometimes is very funny to see other mates running scared. All of us laugh afterwards, but in the meantime they give you a real fright...(Rodrigo 10, boy).

In the first testimony, Rodrigo mentions a park he likes to visit. This park is located about six kilometres northeast of the colonia Monte Albán where he lives, and some four kilometres from the centre where he works. As he mentioned in another interview, other children in the colonia 'have never been so far' to this side of the city, which makes Rodrigo and his fellow workers proud of this experience and different from other children that work in non-public places. The combination of work and leisure, when working in public spaces, offers children the opportunity to take breaks during their work and find spaces which please them. These places allow them to consider other phases of their own relationships, which account from friendly to antagonistic (see Nairn et al. 2003).

In the second testimony, Rodrigo do not 'leave' the place where he usually works, but brings leisure to it. Therefore, leisure and play are brought into the working routine. The nature of their working experiences and the places where they take place allows children such as him to combine these activities: spaces and activities become flexible. Contrary to what is often seen in Western societies, as pointed out by James et al. (1998: 37), children in working in the streets of Oaxaca do not necessarily consider themselves as being 'out of place', but they are part of it, they are 'their places' giving them a sense of identity and attachment. Children's status is not conceived in terms of dependence toward their families, or as victimised by other adult when working, but from an integral part of their everyday lives, which nevertheless does not occur without conflicts with adults or other children, as in the case of Antonio (see also Baker 1998: 110-116; Kenny 1997). On more than one occasion I witnessed children being harassed by the private security guards in some souvenir shops and restaurants: "You cannot beg in here, go away boy!" However, children are more often than not, very persistent. Other shop owners tolerate children working in their shops, especially if it is late on weekends, the times when both, children and owners have the most customers.

7.2.1 Intergenerational working experiences on the streets

Case Study 1

In analysing how these children are part of a generational working experience, it is important to present the differences in the way parents and adults experience work outside the household. In the following case study I present some aspects of changes observed in the ways an eleven year old boy and his father have experienced working in the streets of Oaxaca City.

Ernesto a thirty-two -year old man, born in a Zapotec village in the mountains arrived to the city with his brother when he was about 12. Rapidly he set himself up as a shoe-shiner in the surrounds of the old bus station in the western part of the city. A relative bought him his first *bolero* box and its contents (tools of the trade). From there on, despite his coy approach to customers, he finally managed to walk the streets of Oaxaca City for periods between four and six hours, while living with his cousin's

family in a small house in the colonia Monte Alban. A few months later, Ernesto moved towards central areas of the city such as the market Benito Juarez. Ernesto met other children like himself and, finally, at the age of 15, he decided to find another occupation as kitchen assistant (washing dishes and running errands) in a small restaurant, as he felt 'too old' to continue in that job and to compete with younger children. Ernesto learned some skills in the kitchen so a few years later he bought a cart where now he sells *tamales* (corn cakes). This has become a family business, in which his wife and four children participate. In comparing all his working experiences, Ernesto finds shining shoes the most challenging because he did not speak Spanish as did the shoe-shiners, making it difficult in the beginning for him to approach people. In his later jobs, Ernesto learnt some skills, besides Spanish, which enabled him to become an independent worker with his own small family business.

Rodrigo (10, boy), Ernesto's eldest son attends afternoon school. Although he is considered a bright boy by friends and family, he failed his third year due to his extended hours working between his occupation in the streets and his assistance in the *tamales* preparation. His mother had had his third baby brother, so she could not work in the same way for the first months after the birth. Rodrigo, as the eldest son had to cover many tasks at the same time: baby sitting the other child, attending school, running errands and participating in the manufacturing of the *tamales*. Today, he is in the fourth grade of elementary school and his work hours have reduced since his mother is working again. Rodrigo resented failing his third year, but did not say a word to his parents. Being the eldest child, he has learned to undertake many responsibilities at the same time. Before working in the streets, he used to help out around the house, when there was only his little sister to care for. Domestic work, in contrast to working in the streets has advantages and disadvantages:

Laura: What do you like more, doing housework or shining shoes?

Rodrigo: Shining shoes.

L: Why?

R: I'm on my own

L: What do you do on your own?

R: I find customers. If I have a good start, I choose them, if not, I trade with anybody. I can choose them.

L: How do you choose them?

R: First, I look at them from far. I study them. Afterwards I walk as if I'm thinking or something. So, I go close to the ones I like and I ask them.

L: And when the day is not going well?

R: I have to go after everyone, especially men, but the women are always nicer, particularly the gringas [foreign women].

L: How did you learn to approach a customer? Did your father showed you?

R: No. He just took me to the bus station and stayed with me for a little while, watching me from a distance...I learned myself ... I had to bring money home...It was not easy.

L: Why was not easy?

R: Because I had to walk and walk for many hours. Sometimes I didn't have a taco ... I was hungry and tired.

L: But you said that you like it more than staying at home and doing housework?

R: Yes...There everybody bosses me around...I don't like it...Here nobody does...the police sometimes, or the guards in the arcades...but it's rare.

L: Do you walk all the time when you do your job?

R: Don't tell my parents. It's a secret, but... sometimes I go and play at a "cascarita" [football] in the Llano with my friends, or we go to the Canteras Park to eat lemon sorbets... My friend Raul sometimes brings his guitar and we sing... It is very chingon [nice] to be with my friends...

In comparing Rodrigo's and his father's experiences, is possible to note that though there are similarities between their activities per se, their perceptions differ. Rodrigo's father, in a separate interview stated that he did not enjoy shining shoes. It was hard for him because he lacked Spanish and was mocked by other children because of his shyness. When switching occupations, he found the kitchen to be a place where he had to deal with just a few people, speak little and learn to cook. Ernesto preferred to work in a closed space, where relationships are more or less predictable than to stay for longer in the streets as many other adults still do, i.e., Juan (man, 25). Ironically, Ernesto works partially in the streets selling his food, but he remarks the difference from being a child just arrived from a village to an unknown place, and being an adult who has his own business and a good knowledge of the people he sells to and the place he works, which is the same neighbourhood where he lives.

Ernesto grew up in a peasant community, where Spanish was not relevant to maintain their rural lifestyle, only basic literacy. His village school had only classes up to the third year elementary and he had to walk 3 kilometres everyday to attend the next three levels of elementary school, so his parents thought he was better working at home than attending school. So, moving and working in the city was rather an overwhelming event which in the beginning was hard for him to understand and to relate to people. His son, Rodrigo, on the other hand learned the importance of family cooperation and how to deal with some of the challenges that the city presents. Rodrigo, studies his customers and feels at ease in a place he knows well. Rodrigo, on his part, feels more 'autonomous' when working in the streets than when he is at home doing housework (James 1993; Ennew 1994). The city was not such a strange place for Rodrigo, as it was for his father. Rodrigo's experience in dealing with the city places where he works allows him to manipulate and have some control over the time he spend working, playing or relating to other people (Punch 2000; cf. Baker 1998: 115). This is where he associates with his customers, the "nice foreign ladies", the police, and his friends. Knowing these places allows Rodrigo to negotiate with the police for his right to work, which might not always be successful. He is aware of the boundaries between what is legal and the idea of children belonging to specific spaces and, what is even more important, Rodrigo knows how to approach people and demonstrate his ability to sell goods (see Kenny 1997 for a Brazil study). By making himself obvious and exercising his abilities, he challenges the idea of children as passive i.e., totally obedient to the needs of their households (which the dominant representation is of children staying at home and being provided for their parents and/or the welfare system) (Postman 1983).



Figure 1. Working at night in the streets

The lack of parental control over him when he is in the streets allows him to organize his activities according to daily needs and combine it with some leisure (Punch 2000: 58). Although Rodrigo handles both work and play in a more or less organised way, he does not lose sight of his everyday goal. However he resents being told what to do at home and, therefore, the minimal exposition to adult supervision in the streets gives him a sense of independence and autonomy he does not obtain at home (McNamee 2000: 483). Both, son and father have experienced working in the streets. Streets can be an overwhelming place for anyone who has just moved in from the countryside (see Baker 1998).

7.3 Working in the market: girls and the use of space

It has been said that there is a tendency to seclude young girls into non-public spaces and activities as a way to protect them (Nava 1992). However, girls in poor families often cannot escape this limitation due to socio-economic circumstances such as in the case of the girls in the colonia and other cases worldwide (Nieuwenhuys 1994: 2000; Kenny 1997; Ennew & Milne 1989). Though there is a general sense of protection for women and girls in general, this often becomes more a matter of power relationships

among family household members and often beyond it. Machismo is one of the most widespread customs among poor people in societies such as the urban middle and lower classes in Mexico (Chant 1991). As is commonly said in Mexico, ‘women are really the ones who wear the trousers at home’ (Mario, father). So, this often describes domestic relationships at the level of economic organization, while social attitudes towards women are still patriarchal among poor sectors, so resulting in unequal relationships within the household. Girls, as adult women, find ways to cope with these imbalanced relationships by adapting their social roles to their daily needs. So, as it will be shown later, girls tend to belong to an extended network of relationships that allow them to work, to take on domestic responsibility, socialise and at the same time, be protected.

The market can be viewed as a public space, and similar to working on the streets, though it can be a more protective environment for children, especially girls. Adult women sellers tend to look after each other and the children within the same space. Working children become part of the daily relationships taking place in this commercial space. There are two types of sellers in the markets in Oaxaca City, the sellers who are owners or tenants of permanent stalls (concrete open cabins) which are fully licensed, and the “on foot” sellers, who are not entitled to licences, so are considered illegal, but are rarely prosecuted. Girls comprise most of this last group. Girls between the age of 8 and 15 years are the most common, whereas the stable sellers are mainly adults of both genders.

7.3.1 Girls’ negotiating space and relationships

In the market, girls become part of a social network where other adults, particularly women, conform part of their work experience by guiding them in situations where they deal and negotiate with difficult customers or stall owners. Women also act as surrogates if the children get ill and the parents cannot take care of them.



Figure 2. Girls selling art crafts

Case study 2

Sofia a 10 year old girl who sells garlic cloves, chillies and spring onions, fell ill one day and there was no one at home to look after her. One of the ladies working at the same market and an old friend, a *comadre* of her mother took her to her house and looked after her for two afternoons until one of Sofia's sisters was available to take care of her.⁹⁴ Later, Sofia's father took her to the community's clinic to receive treatment and medication.

There are some other cases where girls working in the markets have ambivalent feelings towards the permanent sellers. The continual battle for customers is sometimes the cause of heated arguments. Permanent sellers, mostly adults, tend to be hostile towards children walking with their products in the market corridors. Some girls learn from their own experience, or are warned by older children of these particular sellers. Either way, children seem to be always at a disadvantage when seeking free spaces, where they do not feel threatened or harassed. The permanent sellers see children as a menace to their business. Children are often yelled at and abused by adults, particularly by men. Children, however, learn to ignore these

⁹⁴ Sofia's mother lived in Santa Ana California, in the USA. She was working illegally on a farm. Sofia had not seen her for the last year.

complaints and to employ coping strategies in order to sell their goods, i.e., sitting in front of a closed shop, at the entrances and sides of the market, walking in different corridors, making friends with approachable stall owners.

It is worth noting that some of the young sellers are first generation indigenous immigrant children, coming to work from different parts of the suburban area. In contrast, girls from the colonia are second generation children from immigrant parents. These girls, like the boys selling sweets in the city centre, are more independent and able to endure long journeys and abuse from other people. Sofia, for instance, refers to how she knows about the problems other girls have with the licensed sellers:

The poor little girls are so small, as small as me even though they are older. Everybody yells at them... They do not yell at me because they know me, they know my mother... I feel sorry for those little girls (Sofia 10, girl).

The apparent differentiation between recent comers and city-born children makes the children such as Sofia more knowledgeable of their spaces, whereas the latter ones appear often 'naïve' and 'vulnerable'. What actually happens is more complex. As I observed, there is a strong sense of competition between most stable sellers, independent of their gender. However, women and girls are always hostile to newcomers, and though the constant presence of the latter, some bonding is established with time. Oaxaca born girls and newcomers relate to each other by advising places to sell, to rest and to play, so as socialising each other (James 1983; James et al. 1998; Rabello de Castro 2000). Newcomers also learn the language and the localisms through the Oaxaca born girls. Adult women sellers are more reserved towards these girls, as they view them with caution or simply they do not pay attention to them.

When girls become part of daily life in the market, they are left alone. Hostility sometimes develops into a less harsh approach in the form of paternalistic attitudes (Traczynski 2000). For some others, these children can be nuisance:

They should go back to their pueblos [villages]. They cannot speak Spanish and they just look at the floor. That's why they sell, ...they just stand in front of you and say "cómprame ésto y aquello" [buy from me such and such] and the younger they are, the easier is for them to sell...especially to tourists...we don't do that, we pay our taxes and work from dusk till dawn...I know, they are poor, they should go to school instead... (adult man, diary produce seller with a permanent stall).

As pointed out by James (1983) and James et al. (1998), children tend to socialise to each other as part of their process of learning. In the case of the girls in the market, this introduction to a new environment is done in a child to child relationship. The process, however, is not always without problems and conflict, especially when adults are involved (see Nieuwenhuys 1994). A great sense of camaraderie or solidarity is perceived when children relate to each other in a common goal. This implies the fulfilment of an economic activity. To it is attached also the idea that work does not have to be a burden, but a way to escape adult control and authority (McNamee 2000). By guiding each other, girls become involved in a social network which has its roots in their own ethnic group, as a cooperative strategy, which develops into a degree of autonomy when these girls are left to work on their own by their relatives (Arizpe 1993). The continuity of this support network breaks down and leaves the girls to their own initiative in relating and working in the markets. Depending on their own charisma and creativity and common language they are able to establish networks according to their gender and age (James et al. 1998: 163; Mayall 2002: 37). Young Oaxaca born girls occupy a crucial role in supporting the indigenous girls in engaging in what is not always a welcoming atmosphere. Feminine bonds then appear stronger than men related relationships, especially among individuals of similar ages or generations. Then it is possible to observe seniority attitudes from adult women (unequal relationships) and solidarity between girls (same level relationships) (Mayall 2002: 25).

Case study 3

Irasema (13, girl) who lives in the colonia, found a job in the Central de Abastos Market, with her godmother, who was a permanent stall-holder, selling tomatoes, green tomatillos, chillies and onions. Her job was to clean the tomatoes stems and

tomatillos husks, to remove the onions outer layers and to prepare packages of ¼, ½ and 1 kilo of the products. So, it was easier for her to sell them without having to weigh loose portions. Another of her tasks was to bring water from one of the many tanks distributed around the market, to sweep the floor and to run errands (to bring the lunch or dinners for the owners). She rarely had to make cash transactions. Irasema was more like an assistant. Sometimes she managed baby-sit the two toddlers for the owner's daughter. Her wages were under the minimum salary, being paid about 16 pesos (£0.70) per half a day, in contrast to the girls who encroached on the market, hoping to sell their wares. Irasema had a better sense of the relationships in the section of the market where she worked including rivalries and alliances between established sellers and the children who work 'on foot'. She recognised that men tended to be harsher towards children, whereas women were motherly and sometimes protective. I also observed these characteristics in relation to these children. There was a sense that same gender different age relationships were friendlier, than between cross-gender and age differences. In some studies this is called the 'paternalistic and authoritarian attitude' which some societies express towards what they considered to be inferior persons, either because of their age or their gender-age related differences (Chant 1998, 1991; Estrada 1995). My observation was that the relationship, shaped by sentiments of protection or rejection is based more on motherly feelings, rather than paternalistic. In fact, men tended to ignore these children, or simply reject them. Adult women sellers sympathise with the girls (or young boys) who are at a disadvantage in comparison to them. They may at first threaten them, but eventually they changed their attitude and would guide them or even foster them and make them, to some extent, part of their friend and family circle. As Lupita, a 14 year old girl friend of Irasema says:

I was very scared when I started coming here...I didn't want to be here, some people just bossed me around and were rude and mean...Some old ladies soon made me their friend and would defend me [from abusive sellers]...Now they are like family and I'm even invited to their houses and birthday parties...(Lupita 14, girl).

Lupita, tried to find places everyday to work without being harassed. However, soon she met Irasema, who introduce Lupita to her godmother. So Lupita maintains her

own work load (she sells garlic cloves and matches) and, sometimes, was invited to eat with Irasema and was given some work to do in exchange for some pesos. Irasema's godmother, when young, arrived as an 'on foot' seller and soon was able to work in a stall as Irasema does today. So, it seems that there is an understanding and solidarity towards these girls, which is not always entirely altruist, as in the case of Lupita (Nieuwenhuys 1994: 23; Grint 1997: 198). Often adults say: 'if children want to beg, it is better that I give them an errand so they can earn their money...' which expresses patronizing and paternalistic attitudes, as to reinforce power relationships (Grint op cit.).

Ethnicity, gender and seniority relationships seem to play an essential role in integrating or alienating children from negotiating their status and their place in working in the markets (see Song 2001). Being one of the states' with the largest ethnic diversity, differences in ethnic background are stronger than other places of the country (Valiñas 1993). The use of the languages is a determinant element for people to feel integrated or able to adapt to urban conditions (Salazar 1998: 159). The Spanish language is a cultural element creating boundaries between people, even of the same ethnic background (Clarke 2000). It is only due to social networks (see chapter 6) that people are able to settle down to live and work in places such as in the colonia, allowing them to "move within the city". For Indian children from all over Oaxaca State this is harder to achieve if they do not know the proper channels to approach. So, part of their daily endeavours is to meet people and find places to create networks and so be able to work. As in alliances with local girls and the support of some adult women, this allows them to negotiate their "right" to work in the markets and to cross the boundaries of age and ethnic background by learning Spanish, particularly for those recently coming from the rural areas. So it is the case of Sofia's mother, who arrived to Oaxaca City, to the colonia Monte Alban about 30 years ago, whose experience, was similar to Lupita working in the market selling vegetables. As time passed and she became more involved in relationships with the stable sellers, she became the god-daughter of the woman who today takes care of Sofia.

Gender differences are reinforced through the way adult men disrespect girls' work as unimportant and even interfering with their own business. Women place themselves in what, at first, appear a more conciliatory position, but can reinforce differences of

gender and age. Women like the employer of Irasema, tend to dismiss children's work as valuable by paying low wages, or by using opportunities to use someone else's work with poor rewards. This is masked in a paternalistic sense of protection, which again, may limit the children's own sense of worthiness (Nieuwenhuys 1994: 2000).

7.4 Participating in the local community: communal work

By advocating agency as a main feature of this analysis and its role in the conceptual construction of the child-work experience, further analysis was attempted of two sample cases. Presenting these cases makes it possible to understand the implications of children's participation and relationships in their close society. Social change through action, or to be more precise putting into play their agential abilities (action), working children contribute not only to renewed interpretations or understandings of work, but they construct and reconstruct it (James & Prout 1997; Solberg 1997; James et al. 1998; Baker 1998). Children in this sense exercise their emergent capacity to negotiate (agents), within a domain (structure) they cannot control (as part of past actions) but they can influence through their relationships (Archer 1998: 81).

The degree by which children seem able to ameliorate their constraining positions through negotiation with figures of authority in certain contexts, varies according to the underlying structures (economic, political, and the conceptions about childhood) which reflect many aspects of the cultural background of the urban and rural Oaxacan society (Archer 1998: 81-82, Thompson & Holland 2002). From the interactions of children in relation to work, it is possible then to depict the ways children face and conceive their experience of work within certain contexts. So, following the same approach in analysing cross-generational and space situated relationships, it is possible to examine the role children have in continuing, interrupting a life-style or shaping a new one (Stephens 1995).

7.4 1 Children involved in community cooperation

Although the title of the chapter relates to work in public spaces, I chose to examine the following subject, which at first appears to be experienced within the domestic sphere. Through a more detailed analysis, it is possible to discover that relationships

in the community are established within the level of the extra-household exchange, and in many cases takes place in non-domestic spaces. That is why I decided to examine these relationships in this chapter and not in the one related more to domestic work (chapter. 5). I believe it is important to present the following discussion on community rituals, and to highlight gender differences and the ways children negotiate their community position within secular social grounds.

The case studies examined in this section illustrate the relevance of children's participation in the organisation for the production and reproduction of social values and their identity. This exhibits the interrelations between households and the community in which children are active participants. On the one hand, community work comes from a long tradition that has its origins in peasant community cooperation. Named *tequio* and *guelaguetza* (see chapter 4), these have traditionally fulfilled by ceremonial, domestic and agrarian work within most of the community of the rural Oaxaca State. Until recently, Oaxaca's (state) peasant communities strongly depended on this support or mutual aid, before the communities became more involved in cash-related activities. *Tequio* (mutual aid) has a strong socio-cultural meaning, not just by supplying non-paid labour, but by containing the society itself to its ethnic and identity roots and the sense of membership for settlers (Cohen 1999, 114). *Tequio*, has been, customarily, a gendered activity with men the main participants. Occasionally, adult women participate, if they are very poor, lone parents or widows. So, boys are encouraged from young age to participate in *tequio* activities. This has a double meaning: to participate in accomplishing material needs which benefit the community, and to create a sense of identity and belonging to a specific place.

At the household level, the second collective support custom is the *guelaguetza*. This kind of social support among settlers is not only the social networks observed in other parts of the country (cf. Chant 1991), but a structural assistance with very clear economic exchanging characteristics between different households. Because it is rooted in tradition rather than in pure economic productive interests, relationships are shaped by other socio-cultural values such as solidarity, rivalry, care and so on. All exchanges are made in kind and there is a sense that exchanges have to be made of the same nature i.e., cooking or baking tortillas are some of the most common exchanges

between women of different households. Girls participate in *guelaguetza* with their mothers. Sometimes, they even do without consulting their mothers though they are expected to do so. Although men are allowed to participate in *guelaguetza*, it is more a feminine custom. Men only participate in *guelaguetza* when it relates to agrarian activities. In the colonia this is no longer possible, men's participation in this sense is during the construction of houses and road clearing among neighbours and relatives (see section 7.4.3).

Tequio and *guelaguetza* which take place in ritual and daily life, are common practices resorted to as a way of coping with limited resources and poverty. In what follows, I present two cases which involve children's participation in these practices. The first examines the participation of girls in preparing a coming of age celebration involving *guelaguetza* and the importance this has in their experience of work with a non-economic aim, which stresses some gender and age differences. The second case study analyses the group participation of some boys in a *tequio* activity to improve the colonia's roads.

7.4.2 Coming of age, *fiesta de 15 años*

As presented in Chapter 4, *la fiesta de 15 años*, the 15th birthday party, has become a very popular event among the settlers. This celebration, formerly by the urban classes in big cities of the country (Lewis 1964) has extended to very poor areas of middle size cities. This is the first generation of immigrants experiencing this type of celebrations, previously unknown in their rural communities of origin. Signifying a new stage in life, girls become very excited and making plans of party details, involving godparents, and guests. I noted that this particular event, seems to be one of the few events where apart from involving mostly female participants, it was also an organised activity for individuals rather than a group or community (as with school graduations and some community festivities). Nevertheless, from its inception, it involves a great number of people. It acts to fulfil the girl's self-esteem as well as to recognise her as an adult and confirming her virginity, to which is attached family prestige. So this process involves non-domestic relationships from a domestic point of reference. It reflects how children are involved in different levels of interaction: in

individual terms, in their domestic sphere and with the wider community's value system (as regards virginity).

Although organizing the fiesta is not a matter of daily survival, it implies the intensification of daily work by most able members related to the *quinceañera*, the fifteenth birthday girl. For a whole year, parents and children put all their efforts to save for the 'big day', and the *padrinos*, (godparents) whose even most insignificant contribution is appreciated. Those who are not able to contribute in cash, help physically with the *guelaguetza*. Assistance for this event is generated from two sources: from family members, and from the close community (relatives, friends, neighbours). Men's participation is minimal, as it is mostly a feminine activity. Men keep their same working routines up to the actual day when they decorate their house's patios for the event. Women and girls on the other hand, participate from the very beginning, usually a year in advance.

Girls participate in the *guelaguetza* with people who will contribute to their party. Girls baby-sit, do domestic chores, errands, cooking, looking after elderly people both their own relatives and those of other households. Every activity is counted by the time spend. Sometimes, on ordinary days, the activities are 'paid' on the same kind basis, but when there are events such as the *quinceaños* party, the rules change.

The mother of the future *quinceañera* organizes most of the *guelaguetza* activities and finds people, usually who are poorer than the '*padrinos*' of the *quinceañera* so the girl and her sisters or other female household members can participate. It is like working on credit and under a code well known to everyone. The mother of the birthday girl will return the favours if some similar events take place.

The *padrinos* are usually people chosen due to their closeness to the family of the birthday girl or because they are considered to be better off. Originally, the *padrinos* used to be the same people who attended the christening of the girl; usually a married Catholic couple, though nowadays is very common to select people not involved religiously with the family of the celebrated girl, and what is even more important, to select as many *padrinos* as possible, who will donate anything from underwear, to alcoholic drinks (see also Maldonado Alvarado 1999):

Do you want to be the godmother [who supplies the] of cake? We need a godmother for the cake of her [Alicia's] 15th birthday... (Chela, mother).

Josefina is going to buy my underwear and shoes... Tomorrow she is coming to pick me up to go to the centre and we'll buy some nice clothes for her and for me, she is going to pay.... I want a pair of cream shoes I saw in the market Benito Juarez, they are very pretty. Josefina is very good to me ... (Rosalia 15, girl).

Considering that ritual kinship relates to religious responsibilities, godchildren are usually expected to be obedient and affectionate to their godparents. I observed, however, that this relationship tends to be based on some kind of material reciprocity taking place on secular occasions such as with domestic chores. Girls such as Rosalia were observed 'paying back' for her privilege to be the goddaughter of some people in the neighbourhood. Among the activities she paid back was by performing attending cleaning chores at Josefina's house (godmother), a few days after they went for shopping. Rosalia was seen doing some laundry:

Laura: Were you asked to come to clean today?

Rosalia: I came to say hello to mi madrina [godmother]...

L: Is that why you're cleaning?

R: No. I want to pay her the favour because she bought me my clothes and shoes.

L: Do you have to clean to pay for that?

R: No...But I have to be grateful...to show her and her mother that I care for what they do for me...I don't want them to think I'm ungrateful...

L: Did they ask you to do so?

R: [Rosalia just giggles and turns her head down, saying nothing].

Sometime later I found out that she had been asked very subtly to 'help' Josefina's mother to do some cleaning, which on other occasions she does for payment. Josefina's mother believed that god-parenthood comes with a price, because otherwise

'if poor people get used only to receive and not to give...they become lazy' (Carmen, mother).

Most ritual relationships are based on a certain degree of reciprocity, not necessarily involving respect and affection. Most of those involving children make use of the children's time to work for them, as in the case above.

In other case, Alicia and her mother were very keen to organise her 15th birthday, eight months before this event. Alicia had abandoned school and had enrolled in a 'school of trades' to become a hairstylist. In the mornings she found a job as cook on a street food stall outside the second class bus station. Her mother already had found some of the main contributors to the party. Doing *guelaguetza* with neighbours and requesting godparents for their support. Alicia and her mother Chela agreed that as long as the first of Alicia's wages were going to be spent on some of the expenses, there was not a problem for Alicia to study a trade and work at the same time:

We have to find padrinos for my dress. A friend of my mother was going to be la madrina de misa [godmother], she is a social worker in the school where I'm studying, but she has also been my mum's friend for many years now... (Alicia 14, girl).

On another occasion, when we were discussing about the motives for her to abandon school, she mentioned again her 15th birthday:

It is just because I'm still studying that my mother allowed me to work and leave secondary [school]. I didn't like it... but I have to help with the expenses...it is a bit expensive, but I'm really looking forward to it... Mum is very excited...she said she never had a 15th birthday party, those things were not in use when she was small... (Alicia 14, girl).

Rosalía (15) and Alicia (14) were willing to participate in extra-domestic activities and paid work as a way to cover some of the festivity expenses. I saw how adult women and young girls participated in *gozona* to prepare the meal for Rosalía's party.

Rosalia herself had *gozona* help from her neighbours Lourdes and Carmela, two 13 year-old girls, who offered to make some tortillas for Rosalia's party:

Preparing tortillas is hard work because it needs a lot of time, it is easy but tiring.... I offered myself to do gozona with Rosalia and her mother, so for my birthday they will return the favour... (Lourdes 13, girl).

As we are poor, maybe if I prepare some tortillas for Rosalia's party, I can receive some favours later...I'd like to have a party with all my family and friends...just like Rosalia...(Sirenia, mother).

As Nieuwenhuys (1994) points out, there are non-economic values within children's work.

The contradictions of everyday life may be made more tolerable by attributing a non-economic value to economically worthless work and concentrating on 'higher' values such as personal or social worth and a feeling of self-esteem (ibid.: 23).

So, rituality, besides being used to reproduce local identities, work has acquired for other secular meanings, where children 'learn to do culture' and conform to it (James et al. 1998, 83). These involve children's work and their willingness to participate. Participation, though, is not always a positive process because it might entail incongruity and act as a disadvantage towards children's positions and expectations within a western dominant framework, i.e., Rosalia's case, or Alicia for abandoning school so as to work and save for her birthday celebration.

At the individual level, these relationships open a new dilemma for children. The coming of age celebration signifies the acquisition of a new social and individual category: as a young woman recognised for her productive, sexual and social roles. The three of them go hand in hand with the notion of a more dynamic role in contributing to the family income, or discontinuing to do so. Most girls involved in this research had plans to study and work soon after their completion of their college studies. But at least the two girls interviewed for this section, got married after that

and interrupted their studies, became pregnant and lived with their parents (see also Kenny 1997: 162).

7.4.3 Community work

In contrast to the girls, boys do not have a 'coming of age' celebration or culmination date. The coming of age expressions are diffused more in terms of their daily participation in attending to their households and community responsibilities. Community responsibilities are mainly manifested in attending to *tequio* every now and then, preferably every weekend.

In the colonia, Sundays are dedicated to community work, but often adults fail to attend due to various reasons. The most common reason I found, was their unwillingness to work on Sunday, for most people their only day off work. Other reasons were family commitments, religious or simply relaxation. Adults' work in these circumstances is often substituted by their own children. Young children (from the age of ten, although I met some younger accompanying and helping older children and adults) are often keen to replace their father in doing as much as their physical capacity allows them, usually just carrying shovels or other tools and doing errands for adults. The older the child, the harder the work becomes, i.e., digging, carrying stones or bricks, pipes, ploughing, clearing roads of weeds.

One Sunday, in a *tequio* gathering, I had opportunity to witness something unusual and this allowed me to have a better understanding of the children's role in community work and social reproduction. On this particular Sunday, a mid-spring Sunday in April, the men and boys were gathering to start work as the main road needed clearing of stones, litter and weeds. Men from the surrounding area to this street, Pinopia, and those few owners of cars, were expected to attend the work. It was due to start around six in the morning. This *tequio* was organised to clear the main road of rocks and garbage before the rainy season, avoiding over floods in the bottom houses. The crew men gathered on the curve of the road that goes to the schools. Only 16 of them came, and because the majority failed to attend, the work actually started an hour later. Among the boys some familiar faces were present: Jose Alberto (16), Damian (16), Ricardo (14), Rodrigo (10), Jorge (17), Jaime (11), Santiago (12) and

Felipe (13), Miguel (17), Jose Alberto (15). The youngsters, Rodrigo, Jaime and Santiago were half asleep, while Jorge smoked, and the adult men talked each other, making jokes. There were also two women in the background, Doña Jacinta and Doña Maria. While I chatted to the two women, the men of the crew were arguing about 'who should do what'. It was a very straightforward work. Everyone had brought their own tools (shovels, chisels, brooms and three wheel barrows that belonged to the municipality).

The group was waiting for more men to arrive. They waited for 15 minutes, but only older men arrived. The first thing they did was to distribute tasks: somebody would push the wheelbarrow to collect the weeds, garbage stones and dirt and dump it close to the hillside, where it would, eventually be collected by the garbage truck. So, Jaime volunteered himself for the task, but everybody laughed at him: "You boy, you push any wheelbarrow!" – ordered one of the middle aged men, a truck driver whom I met for the first time.

"[Giggling] you're too skinny and you will faint... (men laughing)...you better take the broom and start sweeping the dirt –continued the same man laughing while he looked at the boys:

You, the one with the black cap, Damian, isn't it? You're the son of Pancho, aren't you? How is he...? You'll push the wheelbarrow, you're short, but strong, I've seen you doing work like this before around here (Martin 44, man).

Damian just smiled and turned towards his friends, whispering something. Later he told me he did not like that man because of his patronising attitude and that was a reason to put men off doing *tequio*.

The atmosphere was permeated with a sense of certain indifference. Some of the men reunited complained that there were less and less of them attending Sunday community work:

They complain all the time that they have no decent roads and that we live in a dump, but I hardly see them around here on Sundays. They are lazy, very

irregular. Only very few of us come all the time. I just didn't a couple of times ...but the rest, just go and see them there, doing nothing in their own homes, or they are too busy fixing their own that they forget their community needs a facelift... (Martin 44, man).

The teenagers were not really attending to the conversation of the adult men. Damian a little surprised by the request, that was more a command, had no time to contradict the man, whose name I soon learned from the two women with whom I was chatting. The name of this man, the one who was the informal organiser of the Sunday work, was Martin. This man, in his mid forties, was a truck driver who collected and delivered supplies between Oaxaca City and other mid cities in the region. He had been living in the colonia since his early thirties. He had tried to find a job in the United States when he was in his twenties, but after been chased by the Border Patrol, he decided to go back to Oaxaca City and stay there for good. He was one of the few men with a stable job: Martin was a driver for a Oaxacan supermarket chain (Pitico). So, he had Sundays off and was keen to work for the community. He was literate and argued about the importance of preserving not only the *tequio* and *guelaguetza*, but of encouraging the settlers to contribute to the improvement of the infrastructure. Involving young people like the boys was an important issue for the community to consolidate future and regular participation.

The youngsters were not so convinced of the utility of their work if others were unwilling to cooperate, as Damian stated:

I don't mind coming to do tequio, as my grandpa cannot do it because he is so old. He sends me on his behalf. I know all about the tequio, but why do only us have to be here? What about all those people who live over there and hardly ever come? [signalling towards the upper houses in the ravine] What if we don't come? Nobody else would. I don't mind helping around, it's only not fair for just a few to do so... (Damian 16, boy).

Other teenagers started mumbling between them. Ricardo (14, boy), trying to mediate between the men and said:

It is our obligation to do tequio. We know that. We should do it even if the other men don't come...They are losing the opportunity to cooperate. When their turn comes, we'll see who does tequio and who doesn't...They cannot claim we don't work, but we can be proud of our bit...Look, Damian's grandpa cannot come because he is old and too weak to do this job, but he cleans weeds around his road whenever he has time... doesn't he, Damian? I've seen him...That is tequio even though he doesn't come. My father also clears rocks that fall onto the road where we live every now and then. You could say that is tequio because it benefits us and our neighbours...we don't expect thank you from everyone, but at least we have a nice road... (Ricardo 14, boy).

Martin nodded and immediately added:

Yes boy, you're right... So why don't we start once and for all and stop talking. Better occupy ourselves doing some things than chatting...It will be hot in a couple of hours and it will be lunch (Martin 44, boy).

The men and the teenagers soon started clearing the rocks from the road; Damian effectively took one of the three wheelbarrows and collected stones and other disposable materials from the men. Jaime helped to push the wheelbarrow, as a silent agreement between him and Damian to defy Martin's command. Ricardo was shovelling gravel into some of the holes in the uneven surface between the crossroads in Pinopia and Donaji Street. The other boys, Jose Alberto, Miguel, and Felipe were doing the same, while some of the adult men carried bags full of disposable material. Martin, in the meantime was endeavouring to cut weeds and other wild plants with his large machete.

The disposed material was piled up in a corner, where a municipality truck would collect it to take it somewhere else. Some of this same disposable material is recycled to cover up uneven surfaces as Ricardo did. As most of the teenagers were fairly enthusiastic when the work started, but as the day went on, they seemed to become more involved in it while chatting, joking, teasing at each other, and at times even singing. The older men took frequent breaks, while the youngsters seemed to have

forgotten their initial unhappiness and were very engaged in doing their job. At some point, however, some of the teenagers started throwing small stones at each other. Ricardo, in his conciliatory attitude, interfered by asking his friends to work and demonstrate adult men how 'capable they were of doing the same work'.

Ándenle pues, come on, lets show those [men] that we can work as hard as them, and even better... (Ricardo 14, boy).

The crew worked for a distance of 300 metres along Pinopia Street (the original plan was to cover almost a ¼ of the street distance if they had had more men in the crew). Some big rocks were put aside, for hillside walls. A day's work on a *tequio* session usually takes a regular work day (from raise till dusk, with lunch and other short breaks). So, by the time it ended around five, most of the men were exhausted. The adults, who already were drinking some mezcal, continued doing so in a side street, whereas the boys went back home to eat, clean themselves and go to a basketball match.

Tequio is perceived ambiguously by the younger generations. Sometimes it is seen as a burden rather than a cohesive activity but, as it was observed during the situational case, the comrade spirit which developed made children more eager to participate after Ricardo talked and mediated the situation. Due to the major participation of boys in activities non-related to the community, such as a variety of games (sports, individual games such as video-games, cinema viewing, etc); this ambivalence is influenced by the way boys associate work with adult responsibility and looking after others. Whereas play is perceived as a same age/generation activity, entailing groups or individuals, work within the community (and for the community), involves a collective initiative, which children identify as beyond their ability.

7.5 Conclusion

Children portrayed in this chapter have multiple representations. They act as income contributors, thus assuming a productive role which in Western societies is associated with adulthood. Nevertheless, these children are not in this sense 'adults', as it has been revealed in other studies (Kenny1997). Maybe the ends and some of the means are

similar to adults' work, but there are activities and spaces where children do things adults might consider pointless or a waste of time such as 'escaping' during the work time to play or sing with friends. Although their work is often considered to be insignificant or not having value. Children who work in public places understand the value of their work, more than children in domestic environments. Knowing their position enables them to negotiate with adults in their work places. The autonomy of being away from home allows them to create relationships, which otherwise they would not be able to have if just staying at home.

Gender and age differences are enhanced according to the places and the people children relate to when working. Boys working in the streets and girls working in the markets are exposed to different relationships. Boys, as observed, tend to be more autonomous and independent from adults working in the streets, whereas girls are more likely to establish and create networks of support with other girls and women. Nevertheless, for boys and girls the generation differences are acute when relating to adults. The values they hold are in accord with the times they live and what this entails. As Kenny (1997: 167) states, 'it is not need, or ability which is the primary determinant of how redistribution [of resources] is carried out, but the way relationships are established'. Power, generational and gender relationships place children usually in an unfavourable position. Even in situations and relationships where children are at a disadvantage, they often find ways to escape these constraints and place themselves in better positions, which nevertheless, might not suit the Western ideas of childhood. As Bahskar (1989: 195) states, 'in social life, only relations endure', and children participate in making it possible so that the social structure can continue to be maintained.

Chapter 8

Conclusions

8.1 Introduction

The central aim of this thesis was to investigate agency in the context of child work, in order to understand children's point of view in their everyday experiences related to work. Viewing them as agents, it is possible to set conceptual boundaries and to examine relational processes that allow an independent assessment of the dynamics in the interaction of child workers in their societies (Archer 1995). Thus, children, although facing limitations in their negotiating powers, can still act independently in their negotiations, which include not only survival decisions, but also relationships that can lead to material and emotional support. I examined this activity of working children in my sample from an integrated point of view, from within a socialisation process that involves them in their household and wider social environment. Moreover, by observing child workers in their productive environment, I deduced the extent of the influence of the social environment on the socialisation and negotiation processes of children (Solberg 1997). Hence, a concept of child work has to reflect local realities and the dynamics discussed throughout the thesis, rather than to take for granted widely accepted definitions that may pre-emptively exclude cultural values to some expressions on child work and relationships. Influenced by the recent literature on childhood as a social construction and child work studies (Jenks 1997; James et al. 1998), the scope in this thesis was to provide an anthropological picture of working children negotiating their places within the relational processes approach (Archer 1995; Mayall 2002). These negotiations entail relationships with other agents and are realized within the socioeconomic context which influences them.

8.2. Overview of the chapters' discussions

In order to facilitate the main research objective, as briefly described in the previous section, it was necessary to detail a list of further aims and objectives (see introduction of thesis). All these bind together to provide a better understanding of the position of working children in the household and society, and to investigate their degree of social and economic participation in everyday life. In this subsection, I address directly the

aims and objectives stated in the main introduction of the thesis, which often appear overlapping each other in the various chapters.

The first objective was to investigate the concept of work for the children in a marginal society such as the colonia Monte Alban. Specifically, this thesis explores how children's notions of work are influenced by the way household and community lives are structured, as individual participation is essential to the survival of the household and the wider community. Thus, children regard themselves not only as contributing to their own survival but to the continuity of their household and the community's well-being (cf. Boyden et al. 1998). Although working experiences between parents and children do not differ substantially in present times, the rural background of the parents has influenced the way in which children understand their position when working (cf. Goodnow & Warton 1991; see also Mayall 2002). Their work is important in that it contributes to the well-being of the household or the community, however this contribution is often ignored by grown ups (chapters 5 and 7). According to my findings and referring to Boyden's et al. (1998: 22) definition, children's own notions of work are perceived as an effort that adds to the wellbeing of their households. Whether work is paid or whether it takes at least ten hours per week seems to be irrelevant to children's ideas of work (chapter 5).

The second objective guiding my investigations was to observe children acting as real co-providers for their families and how their economic contribution often failed to be recognized by their parents and other elders (Kenny 1997; James et al. 1998; Levinson 2000). Children's participation in the dynamics of their local economy and households allows them to act as essential agents in reproducing their lifestyle. Their participation however is not always recognised, so children have to find ways to be acknowledged by establishing their own social networks and negotiating their status using traditional institutions such as the '*Guelaguetza*' or '*Tequio*' and coming of age celebrations, as discussed in chapter 7.

A further objective was set in order to understand the extent to which children and parents share sociocultural values towards the experience of work. Although there are common values in the notions of work between the generations of my sample, significant differences exist as well. The children I observed in the colonia strived to

receive recognition for their efforts, at home or at work, which was a taken-for-granted-issue for their parents' generation, as it has been observed in other cultures (Reynolds 1991). Parents believed that acknowledging and encouraging the individuality of their children, by praising their work and achievements, would induce a sense of selfishness and egoism. Thus they thought that their praises could affect or impair the well-being of the household or the community as their children would be encouraged to pursue self fulfilling paths (i.e., studies, career etc) (chapter 5).

Comparisons between generations in my sample allowed me also a further objective. These inter-generational differences made it possible to examine how children act as important economic and cultural agents in bridging their parents' original society with their current community (Furman 1989; Bost et al. 1994). Generational changes helped me to observe the degree to which children were more adapted than their parents to face economic and social changes, working in an urban milieu, while at the same time being required to fulfil social and traditional rural commitments as their parents do (chapter 6). In this sense, their agency characteristics, as economic contributors and active participants in their socialization, contrast them to their parents' way to deal with the city environment and the work opportunities (Levison 2000).

An important objective throughout was to highlight the relationships that define children's sense of working identity. Children's identity as workers is not constructed exclusively from the economic value it entails, but also from the relationships that work itself allows them to establish (Boyden et al. 1998; Baker 1998). Children's working identity is based on the activities they perform and to people to whom they relate. Activities often result in cash or in kind payments, but also in acquiring knowledge from other people's experiences, thus enriching their human capital (Bourdieu 1989) (chapter 7). To facilitate the investigation of these relationships, I had to explore the places where children work, principally centred in the households and public places. Working within households turned out to be more constraining for children, whether they performed chores or domestic paid work. Children were under the surveillance of older household members, either elder siblings or parents. However, as it was observed, even in the enclosed spaces such as the household, children found ways to escape the control and the authority of adults by making chores a game. In the public spaces where children worked, they expressed more autonomy than their counterparts at home. Children

working in the streets or the marketplace were able to combine work with leisure, which ultimately gave them a sense of self-worth and fulfilment (see also Nieuwenhuys 1994; Punch 2001) (chapters 5 and 7).

The shift from living in a rural community where the parents grew up, to an urban society where the present generation of children is growing up, urges the latter more into an active socio-economic role, rather than a passive one. They are not only socialised by learning their current society values and norms as those of their parents, but they socialise each other and in some cases they participate in adult socialisation (James 1983; Tracynski 2000; Song 2001: 57; Mayall 2002: 106-107) (chapters 6 and 7). However, the aim here was not only to investigate patterns of socialisation, but to examine the nature of interrelationships as well. I found that relationships strengthen children's knowledge of their surrounding world. It is through the relationships within their families and work that is possible for children to learn about their society and to eventually guide others through it (James 1983) (chapters 6 and 7).

While engaging in the investigation of patterns of socialisation and generational differences, it was important to consider additional objectives such as understanding the social categories of gender, age and generation, as the shaping elements of children's relationships within work. In analysing these elements, it was possible to observe that each of these elements plays an important role in defining children's own notions and experiences of work (Punch 2000). Differences between girls and boys are defined by tradition, as well as by the way the local society is structured in supporting further education and job opportunities. Boys were observed to perform better at school in the long term, whereas girls in my sample exhibited a tendency to replicate the pattern of previous women generations, i.e., limiting their job prospects to the informal market or engaging in early marriage (chapter 5). However, the above barriers between genders were not always fixed as children could often negotiate their transgression of these barriers (Strathern 1988; Lee 2001; Montgomery 2003; Lorber 2003). Through negotiation and networking in everyday life, children in my sample exercised their agency skills and dealt with the obstacles provided by their parents' authority in terms working, studying, having fun etc (chapters 6 and 7). This shows that children can control their lives to a certain degree in everyday life, by creating their own sphere of social relationships (Punch 2000; James et al. 1998).

A final objective, but no less important, was to understand the allocation of work and negotiation of authority for working children in the colonia Monte Alban. Children, as I found out, were able to occupy an active role in the allocation of work (Salazar 1998). Although the general idea of masculine authority prevails, it is actually women and some elder children who organise activities and distribute resources (see Nieuwenhuys 1996). Children, in general, have a certain degree of participation in deciding some activities, although the sense of seniority and age differences still exists as in other societies in Latin America (Kenny 1997; Punch 2001).

8.3 The nature of child work: social relationships

For many people in Western societies, child work carries a certain stigma (Qvortrup 2001). However, working children in poor societies often find ways to deal with their economic limitations in the place of work, being the household, the streets or the market. As the balance between agency and structure takes a primary role in understanding children's choices and limitations, it is important to record their accounts and values over work. They need to be regarded as agents with their own identity, so as to examine their socialisation patterns and their ability to participate in household reproduction. In this thesis, it is shown that working children are not passive members of their society but active contributors, able to learn from their family's past and traditions, while striving to survive in poverty and hostile social environments (Qvortrup 1994; Niuwenhuys 1994; Levison 2000).

Working children's survival activities resort to their relationships and agency characteristics, which include their ability to negotiate their status or position within their household and community. It is of paramount importance to observe the ways in which they establish links with other agents so as to negotiate and participate in decision making processes, which is something that this thesis examines throughout the empirical chapters (James et al. 1998; Mayall 2002) (chapters 5, 6 and 7). Children's interviews reveal the influence of trans-generational ideas in terms of work experience, on their understanding of their present status and their notions of work (Mayall 2002). This perception is also shaped by the relationships with other people and the broader social context. This implies that working children in the colonia Monte Alban are not completely independent actors, as they can be influenced by their household dynamics

and social conditions. However, this thesis highlights that working children's agency allows them a dynamic perception of their position in their realm of productivity, which can be conceived for instance, as making a 'career', as it was observed among street Nepali working children (Baker & Panter-Brick 2000). Gender, age and generation influence agency in diverse ways. This leads to a degree of ambiguity when it comes to regard children's roles and their importance as domestic contributors and ability to participate in decision making processes (Solberg 1997, 2001; Becker et al. 2001; Song 2001; Kjørholt 2002).

The agency of working children embodies a certain degree of negotiation about domestic roles and decision making within household boundaries. The extent to which children are able to participate on their own account is influenced by their relationships with their parents as well as their parents' socioeconomic background. So, this participation has been advantageous for the household as children act to guide and integrate it to the urban environment (Mayall 2002). I observed in my sample that children were well aware of their parents' origins and felt the difference between them and their parents' "rural" ways. Rural origins were not always regarded as negative and older children were able to understand how their family's rural background was influencing their lives. By examining migration patterns I was able to observe the degree of rupture between generations and its implications for the children's ideas about work within an urban context. Therefore, children do not act solely in their own account, but integrating their own experience and perspectives based on "constraints and opportunities in the children's environment" (see Baker & Panter-Brick 2000: 162) as to participate in decision making processes. In this sense, it was important to investigate how relationships shape children's perceptions and notions of work and family.

Rural origins may trap many families of the colonia Monte Alban into poverty; however, they also provide the means to integrate as well as to cope with the financial difficulties (Degenne & Lebeaux 2005; Borges 2003). There is a dual aspect of community cooperation that allows families to overcome their economic limitations, and children play a significant role by providing valuable work and support (Sandefur & Laumann, 1998). Within this context, families and children shape their identity and develop social networks and peer relationships, which strengthen children's domestic and non-domestic roles. Children themselves create and develop social networks and manipulate them to

their own benefit, exercising their own initiative (Belle 1989; Bost et al. 1994). This gives them a certain degree of autonomy which shows that their agency can find an expression through community cooperation as well as working experiences (Punch 2001; Levison 2000; Lee 2001). Peer relationships and friendships are identified by children as beneficial to them. Their ability to establish emotional relationships and attachment to other adults and children alike shows that the boundaries between the adult and child world are more subtle than in many Western societies. Adult to child relationships are based on experience and support and provide the means of education to younger generations, ensuring to some extent the continuity of households (Lloyd & Brandon 1993). Child to child relationships are founded on the basis of trust and solidarity, as observed in everyday activities.

Whatever the positive effects of the relationships between adults and children in the colonia, ambiguous and conflictive situations can lead to negative results such as gang participation, family excision, or diminished community participation. Gangs are a way for children to cope with a hostile socioeconomic environment, even when support exists on a family or community level. This is more evident in children who have fathers in the United States, as they regard gang life enhancing their individuality and social status. The mainstream local community does not welcome this attitude due to drug related problems and conflicts that may lead to various outcomes, according to how children react to them, the degree of emotional support and the established networks.

Children are asked to participate in their households' continuity by providing the necessary domestic work so that the adults can pursue paid work. At the same time they are required to provide financial support by working in the streets or other households. Gender and age dictate the socially expected domestic roles, though children retain a degree of negotiating power. They tend to question levels of responsibility and authority and they do not take for granted traditional relationships and roles. Children are able to adapt their environment to their own reality to a certain degree, which shapes their perception of themselves and of adulthood. This is also portrayed in the multiple representations of children in the colonia and their activities (work and leisure). Although their contribution to their household's existence is often regarded as insignificant or taken for granted, children themselves have a clear understanding of their importance, even though their social environment may often make them feel uncertain

about their roles as co-providers. In the latter case, they can be easily marginalised by adults or other household members. Their “defences” against such a marginalisation are their social networks, friends and their ability to negotiate their household position. The latter is influenced by gender and age differences which help shape working relationships and patterns. Even though often in disadvantageous situations, children find ways to improve their status and conditions through relations, which allows the continuity of their social structure.

As it was pointed out in chapter 1, children’s ways of experiencing everyday work emerge from their interactions with their immediate world and their association to other agents, who to a certain degree influence the way they structure their productive lives. This means children are productive individuals in their own right, but at the same time they are part of a more complex structure that predicates them (Bashkar, 1989), and therefore, guides them. This does not mean that they are at the mercy of a pre-established society, but as the relational process analysis suggest (Archer 1995; Mayall 2002), they are as active and relevant to the understanding of how they construct their own identity of productive individuals, as structure precedes and post dates these experiences. In this sense, relationships become essential in defining their experiences: they relate to other people relevant to their occupations, children create their own social networks, they learn about their parents experiences of work, and also they make and adapt certain spaces to their own needs and desires. In sum, children’s working experiences are not necessarily constraining or alienating, but constructed creatively, and at times, ambivalently.

8.4 Final remarks

Adults have specific ideas about work and particularly children’s work. Western societies tend to condemn it, while impoverished ones such as the colonia Monte Alban, view it from a different angle. At the end of the day, whatever the adult notions, children have constructed their own notions of work and play, which are an expression of their relationships with other agents, at home and at work. Although the work is itself important to the survival of the household, the children at times fail to acknowledge or recognise this fact, as there is a strong sense of uncertainty on how valued their work is in general. However, child work and other activities, in which children negotiate their

status, occur in everyday relationships, as an important part of their socialisation, whether this is observed by the society or ignored.

It is clear by the discussion so far, that a significant degree of ambivalence exists regarding children's agency. This is highlighted throughout my thesis and recognised by existing literature (see Jenks 1996; James et al. 1998; Punch 2001; Mayall 2002 and Lee 2001 among others). Children are aware of their economic contributions and importance as individuals, so investigating further these perceptions would aid our understanding of children's socialisation and social participation, especially in difficult environments such as the one of the colonia Monte Alban. Further research is needed, following a similar research model to the one applied here, in wider communities of children, and in different regions, to compare their realities to the findings of this thesis and similar studies. Further research themes could involve locating my subjects in the near future and tracking their working paths in order to establish any intergenerational patterns that may exist. Although it had been done before, it would be a good research subject to compare socialisation patterns in working children of different communities of children e.g., rural and urban milieus. As part of my own observations, it would be useful to trace immigrant children working abroad and to examine their relationships in their community, which may facilitate their social mobility and that of their families. In doing so, analysing the changes of working experiences in diverse milieus could give a better understanding of the children's involvement in international migration and the ways they deal with their identity and productivity.

APPENDIX A

Children's profiles

The next reports intend to guide the reader on the description of some of the households studied during my fieldwork. In some of the following descriptions, exists also references to other members of the units and of other secondary informants (if any).

Name: Jaime

Gender: Male

Main productive activity: domestic paid worker and baby sitting

Age: 11

Working place: Private house, employed by a teacher.

Scholar year: Fifth grade, elementary school.

Household composition: Female Mono-parental

- Jaime lost his step-father in 1997. The father was a street seller of all kinds of old artefacts (electric appliances, metal, clothes, shoes, etc.). Jaime does not know anything about his biological father, who abandoned his family when Jaime was still a baby, to marry another woman in his home-town and moved to another Oaxacan City.
- Jacinta, his mother has irregular jobs as a launderette, preparing tortillas for neighbours and running errands for the catholic priest.
- Jaime is the second child of six children. From the third to the fifth child, all boys, the father is the step-father they lost that Jaime remembered. The sixth child, a girl was the daughter of another partner of Jacinta (his mother). All the children live with the mother in the same residence.
- Jaime and Jorge (17), his elder brother, are the main providers of the household income. Jaime provides about almost as much as his brother to the household's income, making him the second provider in terms of economic contribution.
- He has been working for about a year and a half, starting soon after the death of his step-father. Jaime spends most afternoons working at a teacher's house (from the same school he studies). He cleans floors, washes dishes and the car of the residents; runs errands and baby sits the two young children of the couple. Jaime also carries out domestic chores when his mother has to go out: he cooks, washes and puts children to sleep.
- Jaime attends the local school in the morning shift. He considers himself as an average student who "is good" but who emphasizes about his active and "naughty" behaviour.
- The house he and his family occupy is one of the poorest of the sample. It is a one room metal house with three beds (two single and one double), with no electricity or drinking water.
- I interviewed Jaime, Jacinta and Jorge.

Name: Alicia

Gender: Female

Age: 14

Main productive activity: Selling clothes and shoes, working in a food stall.

Working place: The indoors market

Scholar year: Second grade of secondary school

Household composition: Nuclear domestic unit

- Both parents work and act as the main breadwinners. The mother works selling second hand clothes and shoes in the major market, cosmetic products and other domestic products. The father sharpens knives and other blades, offering his service in markets and on the streets.
- Alicia is the eldest child of five children. All the family members live in the same household without any other relatives.
- Alicia goes to school in the mornings and on weekends from Friday afternoon accompanies her mother to sell their merchandise. She takes care of her siblings, fetches them food and takes them back before the mother returns home.
- She started working along with her mother at the age of eight.
- The house was built by the parents 13 years before. They are in process of acquiring ownership of the land.
- I interviewed Alicia, Chela the mother, and Pablo, the father.

Name: Ricardo

Gender: Male

Age: 14

Main productive activity: Weaving and selling hammocks

Working place: Home, where he weaves hammocks, and the street and markets to sell them.

Scholar year: Completed secondary.

Household composition: Nuclear.

- Ricardo's father weaves and sells hammocks as does his mother and the elder sister.
- They learned the activity in Villa Alta, their village of origin in the North Zapotec Mountains. Ricardo is the youngest child of three children (composed by other two older sisters).
- Her elder sister is a single mother that moved to live in Veracruz. The middle sister works part time weaving and is employed in a stationery shop.
- Ricardo spends weekends and some week days selling hammocks with his father. They travel to the nearby villages.
- Ricardo studied in San Martin's secondary school and graduated in 1999. He decided not to study but to work with his father during the time of my field work.
- Their land was bought 10 years earlier and they are expecting to regularise its property.
- Ricardo learned to weave hammocks from the age of five, but he initiated at the age of nine his contribution to the production for the market.
- I interviewed Ricardo.

Name: Santiago

Gender: Male

Age: 12

Main productive activity: Brick layer apprentice-assistant.

Working place: Various settings around the city.

Scholar year: He studied only in the first grade of elementary school.

Household composition: Extended, composed by his married sister and husband, their children, Santiago's mother and occasionally his stepfather.

- Santiago's mother works as a cleaner and also begs on the streets.
- Santiago has no father.
- Santiago is the second child of three children.
- He started working with a brick layer "master" at the age of seven. He carries cement bags, bricks, and wood. He knows rudimentary construction techniques.
- He earns a minimum salary that goes entirely to his mother.
- He does not know how to write or read because his mother withdrew him during his second year in elementary school.
- The house they live in belongs to the husband of Santiago's eldest sister.
- I interviewed Santiago, the mother and his eldest sister.

Name: Irasema

Gender: Female

Age 13

Main productive occupation: Working as kitchen assistant.

Working place: A small kitchen in the nearby colonia of San Martin.

School year: Sixth grade of elementary school.

Household composition: Nuclear.

- Irasema's father does not work because he suffers of a long-term illness.
- Her mother is the main breadwinner working as cook in San Martin by preparing tamales.
- Irasema is the oldest child of three siblings.
- Besides assisting her mother three times a week, she looks after the father and the other two sisters by cooking, doing the laundry and supervising her sister's school work.
- She started working with her mother when she was eight in the different jobs the mother has engaged to (as launderette, house cleaner and cook).
- They live in a metal two-bedroom house with an independent shack as a kitchen, built by the father. They are waiting to regularise the land tenancy.
- Irasema attends the morning shift at the local primary school with her sisters. She is regarded as one of the most advanced students in her class.
- I interviewed Irasema, her sisters and the father.

Name: Luis

Gender: Male

Age: 16

Main occupation: Looking after his nephews.

Working Place: Home

Scholar year: He completed secondary school (junior school).

Household composition: Extended, female-headed. His household is integrated by his divorcee mother, his married sister, husband and their two children, and Luis' single sister.

- Luis's mother is the main breadwinner working as a cleaner in hotels, in the city centre.
- His two older sisters work also. The eldest as a private security guard, and the middle one as cashier in a supermarket. Partially, their income goes to the household expenses.
- Luis's parents divorced when he was five. His father is a retired army soldier.
- Luis is the youngest of a family of four siblings. The eldest brother lives in another city.
- He has had different jobs before I met him. He worked as a supermarket package keeper, as a cleaner in hotels with his mother, and in private houses.
- He was wishing to move to another city to find a more stable job.
- He started working at the age of 11 by accompanying his mother to clean places.
- They have a concrete-metal two bedroom house and kitchen.
- They want to regularise their land's ownership.
- I interviewed Luis, his sisters and his mother.

Name: Jose Alberto

Gender: Male

Age: 16

Main productive occupation: Domestic, looking after his sister, cleaning and going to school.

Working place: Home and school.

School year: First semester of technical education (graphic design).

Household arrangement: Extended. Jose Alberto's household is composed by his grandparents, his mother and stepfather, his spinster aunt, two single older sisters and his little niece.

- Jose Alberto's father lives in the United States working as carpenter since ten years he time of my fieldwork. He sends some money to his children now and then.
- His mother designs and sews clothes.
- The stepfather works in the market selling groceries.
- His sisters work helping the mother and attend technical school (to become private secretaries).
- Jose Alberto attends the morning shift in a technical school which is located on the other end of the city. In the afternoon he takes care of his half sister while he does his homework or cleans the house.
- The land they live on belongs to his mother's parents. He is expecting to inherit a small plot from his father.
- He wishes to go abroad to work along with his father. In the mean time he expects to continue to have some money to continue on with his studies.
- Jose Alberto has looked after his younger sister since she was born and the domestic tasks since he was seven.
- I interviewed Jose Alberto and his mother.

Name: Lourdes

Gender: Female

Age 13

Main productive activity: Paid cleaner and launderette.

Working places: Private houses and her own home.

School year: None

Household composition: Nuclear; Lourdes' household is composed by her two parents, an elder sister and two older brothers.

- Lourdes has worked since the age of six by going with her mother to work in private houses.
- Lourdes's father has retired after suffering an aneurism. He was currently improving the house construction by replacing metal and wood for brick and concrete in one of the house's bedroom.
- Her mother works full time as a cleaner in a better-off area of Oaxaca City. She initiated this job since she got married, about 18 years before. Lourdes accompanies her, every morning, except when the father feels ill.
- Lourdes is the youngest child of four siblings, all of them engaged in full time jobs: construction and cleaning.
- They occupied their land about 17 years before and are expecting to receive the deeds some time soon, as everyone else in the colonia.
- None of the four children has ever attended school. They are illiterate.
- I interviewed the father and Lourdes.

Name: Antonia

Gender: Female

Age: 11

Main productive activity: Looking after her siblings and going to school.

Working place: Home and school.

Scholar year: Sixth grade elementary school.

Household composition: Nuclear. Antonia's family is integrated by her two parents, two younger sisters and a little brother.

- Both Antonia's parents work. Patricia, her mother works as cleaner in the local pre-school building and occasionally she also works cleaning private houses.
- The father is considered the main breadwinner. He works as taxi driver and sometimes obtains money from betting in cockfighting.
- Antonia is the first child on his father's second marriage to Patricia and the third one of all his children.
- She looks after the roosters, the cat and dog they have, besides bathing the two younger children and looking after them when the parents are absent.
- Antonia is one of the best students in her class, but her marks are lowered because she is considered an "active" girl in her class and likes to play tricks to her classmates.
- The land they occupy was bought by the mother's brother but they are still not owners of it.
- The house is one of the poorest I visited. It is a metallic and wooden one-bedroom metal house, with an integrated kitchen.
- I interviewed Antonia, both parents and the other three children of the family.

Name: Remedios

Gender: Female

Age: 11

Main productive activity: Looking after her younger siblings and going to school.

Working place: Home

Scholar year: Fifth year elementary school.

Household composition: Nuclear

- Remedios' father works as a freelance wall-painter.
- The mother occasionally works by doing cleaning jobs in nearby houses.
- Remedios is the second child of four children.
- She helps her mother looking after the children, sometimes cooking simple meals and doing the laundry of her own clothes.
- The plot their house occupies was a present from her father's parents some ten years before.
- They are the second "better-off" household among all the ones I interviewed.
- I interviewed Remedios, her siblings and both parents.

Name: Jesus

Gender: Male

Age: 15

Main productive occupation: Going to school, working in different temporal jobs.

Working place: School, in a videogame (arcade game) shop, cleaning school rooms.

Scholar year: Last year of secondary school (junior high school).

Household composition: Female headed, formed by his divorcee mother, divorcee brother, and elder sister.

- Jesus' mother is the only informant with a stable job as a cleaner for the regional branches of the most important telecommunication company.
- The father abandoned them a year after Jesus was born. The family does not have any contact with him.
- Jesus found a full-time job after completing his secondary education. He switched jobs afterwards until he was admitted in the technical school which he later dropped out of, to find a job again. He had failed two subjects in his previous school.
- He is the youngest child of four.
- They own one of the best houses in the neighbourhood, with water pipes, telephone and concrete walls. The land was a gift from the mother's father some 20 years before.
- He did not have previous working experience prior to the jobs he found while I was there.
- I interviewed Jesus, the mother and the two sisters.

Name: Rodrigo

Gender: Male

Age: 10

Main productive activity: Shoe shiner in the city centre.

Working place: The Zócalo (main square) of the city.

Scholar year: Third elementary school year.

Household composition: Extended

- Antonio's father works irregularly in the market as stevedore. His father also worked until recently shining shoes in the Central de Abastos. The family sells tamales and other meals.
- He is the oldest of three children.
- He started working a year before I met him.
- He attends the afternoon shift at the local school. Most of his friends are shoe shiners in the city centre and all of them attend the same school and live nearby.
- He charges about 5 pesos (25p) per pair of shoes. He does about 10 to 15 pairs in a morning and more during weekends.
- His family lives with one of the brothers of the mother.
- Their land was a present from the parents of the mother who lived in another town.
- I interviewed Rodrigo and his father, Ernesto.

Name: Rosalia

Gender: Female

Age: 15

Main productive occupation: Student and domestic paid worker. She also does laundry work, sharing customers with her mother.

Working place: San Martin primary school, private houses.

Scholar year: First year technical school in IT.

Household composition: Nuclear

- Rosalia's father works as freelance wall painter.
- Her mother works full time as launderette in central private houses.
- Rosalia has worked since the age of nine. She earns less than one minimum salary when she does the cleaning at the school, and the laundry work is paid "by the dozen" (15 pesos per dozen). She manages to wash about three dozens in one afternoon.
- During the time she is not working, she looks after her siblings, cooks, does their laundry, buys food in the market and visits to see her friends.
- They moved to La Colonia about 16 years ago from Pacific area of Oaxaca State. The family lives in a metal one bedroom shack. They are not legal proprietors of the land occupied.
- I interviewed the parents and Rosalia

Name : Felipe

Gender: Male

Age: 13

Main productive occupation: Wall painter.

Working places: Different settings around the city.

School year: He completed elementary education without plans to continue.

Household composition: Nuclear

- The father works as wall painter providing less than half of the income.
- His mother provides more or less another 30 percent, while Felipe and his elder sister contribute with 35 percent.
- He started working assisting his father at the age of nine. He was so interested in earning money and contributing to his family's income that he decided to start working on his own, as soon as he completed primary school.
- Felipe works full time from Mondays to Saturdays.
- His ambition is to some day hire another works and initiate a team where he would be the "boss".
- In the meantime he works with his half brother. Felipe gets small jobs trough his father's contacts.

Name: Sofia

Gender: Female

Age: 10

Main productive activity: selling vegetables, going to school.

Working place: The Central Market.

School year: Third year of elementary school.

Household composition: Extended.

- Sofia's father sells vegetables since they moved from their village to La Colonia.
- Sofia's mother left to work in the United States. They have no idea where she is.
- The main income comes from selling their products in the market.
- She has failed one year of school and was repeating it at the time of my fieldwork. She disliked going to school and would prefer to work full time at the market.
- Sofia is the youngest child of five children. Her two older brothers and sister are married. The sister's family lives in the same plot but hardly contribute to the income, though they make use of food and other resources within the household.
- Sofia does not receive a direct income, but her father buys her clothes now and then and spends on her school needs. She also visits her grandparents in the village twice a year.
- I interviewed Sofia and one of her sisters.

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